SUNNY MATEEL

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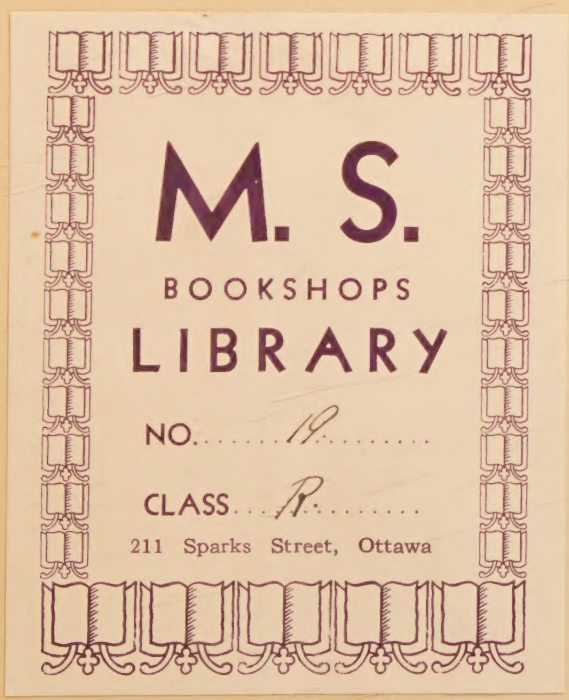

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July 1932
Gerald Lauerty.
Ottawa

SUNNY MATEEL

BY

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OVERLAND RED,
THE RIDIN' KID FROM POWDER RIVER,
PARTNERS OF CHANCE, ETC.

GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

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CHAPTER I

Ward Selden, standing on a wooded rise above the cut, looked down upon the tiny groups of tiny men scurrying about the steam shovels. Temporary track had been laid through the Northern wilderness up to the cut, and along the rusted strips of steel ran a slowly moving string of flat cars. Selden watched the operations, as familiar to him as his own hands, with a lack of interest which annoyed, troubled him. Assistant engineer, young, healthy, and with an excellent record, still he felt dissatisfied with his occupation. The long arms of the steam shovels rose, hesitated with stiff, grotesque movement, swung above the flat cars, and then the flat-backed steel hands opened and a trickle of earth fell on the platform of the car. Grunting and whistling, the steam shovels swung their stiff arms away from the train and, dipping, gouged into the

bank of red-brown earth. Like a man lifting a heavy weight, they strained and puffed as they grasped more earth and slowly drew it upward.

Selden could hear the clink of shovels, the occasional commands of one or other of the foremen, and the hiss and stutter of the steam shovels, which looked like beetles with exceedingly long front legs, rising and dipping, yet with no grace — always stiffly, hesitantly, yet with excellent accuracy and dispatch. The locomotive backed the flat cars down between the shovels until the train had its load. Then it drew south, and stopped on a sketchy, timber-trestle. Insects smaller than the steam-shovel beetles, insects with tiny bright steel shovels in their hands, scrambled aboard the flat cars and shoveled the dark earth overboard, making a fill which was slowly rising up the spidery legs of the trestle, eventually to submerge it.

The right-of-way ran through virgin wilderness, forests dense, seemingly illimitable. Far to the north gleamed a steely blue dot, the suggestion of a forested lake. Attached to the dot was a silver thread that vanished in the deep blue of the timberlands. Ward

Selden's gaze was on the steely blue dot, the silver thread of river, Nennassing. He breathed the name, repeating it. From below came the faint, long-drawn warning, preceding the firing of a blast. The insects scurried to various shelters. The steam-shovel beetles stood with their long, ungainly arms out, the steel palms empty and open. The work train was on the trestle below the cut. A thread of steam curled from the exhaust of the locomotive. A spurt of dirty smoke rose suddenly in the cut. The dull, distant 'thump' of the explosion was followed by another and another, as an umbrella-shaped billow of dust rose, and rock spurted up, and a yellowish haze hung above the trough gouged in the hillside.

The work train, scraped clean of earth, backed toward the steam shovels. The steam shovels snorted, trembled, and, reaching down their stiff arms, grasped handfuls of rock and dirt, heaved them up, and, dipping, let them sift to the platform of the flat cars.

'And-so-on, and-so-forth, till the cut is finished and the rail is down,' said Selden, smiling to himself. 'Hanged if I can't smell powder clear up here!'

And the faint smell of blasting powder irritated him, made him feel disgusted with the work below, with his share in it. It recalled the steam drill and the powder work in tunneling, the smell of wet limestone, hot steam, acrid powder smoke; the eternal clatter of drills, the drip of water from fissures and seams, the rumble and clank of the narrow-gauge dump cars — and here, below him, the same thing was going on, these industrious insects were clawing up the soil, gouging out cuts, tunneling vast hills. Selden resented this industry, his share in it. The element of chance was all but lacking. It was too excellently accurate. Why, the Sagone tunnel, with crews working in from either side of the range, came out within a hair of the estimate. The three inches' variance when the two crews met midway in the heart of the mountain was more than absorbed by the peculiar strata at the junction. And Selden had engineered that piece of work, his first big job. The newspapers had given him quite a puff. Yet there was nothing wonderful about it. The actual work had been done on paper months before the first drill was set up. "It's getting too

blamed easy to mutilate the wilderness,' reflected Selden. 'We're getting too clever at it, as a race. Some day we're going to bump into a dead wall. That means right-about and a simpler way of living. But that's a long way off.'

Gazing at the distant, steely blue dot, Lake Nennassing, Selden visioned a journeying up into that country, alone, with never a plan, nor a wish for anything other than solitude and the stimulus of each new day's adventuring. And it could be done. With a rifle, a twist of trout line and a few hooks, some provisions and a blanket — not forgetting a good map . . . But there must come an end to every trail. Winter would have something to do about it. And loneliness. It would be worth while, while it lasted. Selden could hear his chief say: 'You want to cut and run for it, eh? Tired of the work, and we're so near through? Woods? Losh, man, aren't you in the woods now? And haven't you been for somewhat of two years?'

That was it! Selden turned to his own side of the picture. He had been in the wilderness two years. But what had he seen

of it? Day and night he had been 'on the job,' his mind given to the work, his body trained to a military hardness and readiness, responding to emergencies, a veritable minute man, his whole being attuned to the jingle of the camp telephone. What chance had he had to enjoy the forests and lakes and rivers, the calling of the herons and the loons, the subtle twilights veiling the forest edges as the moose nosed beneath the water for lily stems? And here and there a trail, an old Indian trail reaching on up toward the Great Bay and the frozen country. But these trails were now fresh blazed by the first survey for the new railroad, and, where they paralleled it, littered with tin cans, tobacco tags, and empty bottles. West of the right-of-way, however, the country was wilderness supreme, unspoiled. And there was a trail that branched from the north-and-south trail paralleling the railroad, a dim trail that came down from the Nennassing to the settlements near the international border. Among his things Selden had a map of the country through which that trail ran, a map he had found in an old book on wilderness travel, long out of print. It would be

good sport to make a try for the Nennassing and check with the old map to see how accurate it might be. It would be both a relief and a joy to travel alone, with no definite schedule to observe; to travel silently through the forest silences, along trails of soft twilight dappled with the faint, moving shadow of the branches of pine and spruce and fir; to go on and on, joyously, while his spirit rested in the hush of the voiceless wilderness. To make camp whenever and wherever he wished to do so, with no obligation to companionship, with no one urging him to hasten or delay. And, as though he had already entered the land of adventuring, he visioned the railroad construction camp as from a great distance, and with a perspective which rather magnified than diminished its sheer rawness and ugliness. Not that he found any fault with the camp itself, the board shacks and ragged and dirty tents, the crude mess hall, and the many makeshifts of a temporary camp. But he did resent to the depths of his soul the intrusion of filth upon the wilderness; inexcusable slovenliness and waste. Food wasted, clothing wasted, materials wasted, and often

wages squandered, thrown away. And yet it was considered a first-rate camp, with a good record for efficiency. Cast-off clothing, empty tin cans, empty bottles, broken shoes, odds and ends of broken harness, tools, and useless materials, rags and tags of civilization — glanced at or ignored in the city — these he could not ignore here in the clean halls of the forest.

Yet if Selden had searched his soul to the bottom he would have found that he pitied rather than blamed the workmen, the laborers who, in his eyes, desecrated the sanctuary of the wilderness. To the corporation he served, the laborers were no more than the shovels, picks, and drills they handled, and the laborers knew it. Half of their wildness, their drunkenness and ribaldry and gambling was simply an expression of their contempt of foremen, corporations, civilization, and life itself. They danced on the ragged edge of oblivion, grimaced at fate, mocked and at the same time envied the astute, the prosperous, knifed and shot one another in some lewd quarrel, or became worn and prematurely aged, surviving hardship and dissipation, but ever and ever toiled

like demons in the pit itself for scanty pay, for pride, collectively, in accomplishing the impossible.

The far distant blue dot of Nennassing faded as the shadows of the forest enveloped it. The rolling blue-green timberlands swept on and on out to the horizon and were splotched here and there with the flat black shadows of slowly moving clouds. The afternoon sunlight slanted across a vast world of timber, with never a break to mark a town or a habitation. Below, the puttering steam shovels nuzzled the earth from the cut, swung it aloft, released it with titanic ease.

Selden moved slowly down the hill, occasionally pausing as he drew nearer to the cut, that he might watch the progress of the beetles and bugs industriously gnawing away the hillside. Farther down he called to one of the foremen who came up from the track and talked with him. Selden suggested widening the base of the fill that there might be no question as to the stability of the completed work. Together they walked to the upper edge of the fill. The foreman stooped, picked up a piece of the rock ballast. 'That's the stuff we're getting out of the cut, now,'

he said. Selden weighed the bit of rock in his hand, glanced at it, tossed it down. 'Heavy, ain't it?' said the foreman.

They stepped from the track as a string of loaded flat cars backed down. 'It'll take a lot of rock to fill that hole,' and the foreman gestured toward the space beyond the slant of the fill. Selden told him to keep at it; to shift the temporary track six feet to the west, to begin widening the fill next morning. The foreman shrugged his shoulders, nodded. 'You're the doctor, Ward.' He addressed Selden by his given name. They had known each other a long time.

'You didn't even look at the bit of rock I showed you,' said Jimmy Ryan, stooping and picking up another piece. 'But any of them will do. They're about the same since we got deep into the cut yonder.'

'What about the rock?' Selden took the piece Jimmy held out to him. The young engineer examined the fragment, scratched it with the point of his pocket knife, and gazed at it through a small pocket glass. 'Any more like this?' he asked presently.

'More like it? You're standing on tons of it. The track is ballasted with it, from here

to the cut. And we're dumping four train-loads an hour into the fill. But what's the joke, Ward?'

'I'm not positive,' replied Selden. 'But I have an idea we've been ballasting this stretch of track with high-grade silver ore.'

CHAPTER II

JIMMY'S Celtic eyes twinkled. He took the piece of rock from Selden and gazed at it, turning it over and over with his blunt fingers. 'It does look different from any rock I ever saw. But silver, Mr. Selden! Why, if it's silver, there's enough in that fill to make us millionaires!'

Selden smiled at the foreman's sudden intensity. 'Not quite enough for that, Jimmy. And the rock belongs to the company. Then, we're a long way from a smelter.' Selden glanced toward the cut. 'And the alternate sections on either side of the right-of-way belong to the company. As I recall it, the section adjoining the cut is government land. Let's step over to the hill.'

'Is there anything to hinder our filing on the land?' asked Jimmy as they strode down the track toward the cut. 'Besides, Mr. Selden, it isn't as if the ore was a hundred miles from a railroad. Here it is, right on the line. Do you think, now ——'

'I don't know that it is silver, Jimmy. We can nose around a bit. Get a pick and we'll see if we can uncover some of this rock on the other side of the hill.'

'Meaning it might peter out right here along the line? Well, I've heard of them pockets, and such. But don't break me heart by throwin' cold water on it, Ward. Give me a chance to feel rich for a couple of minutes, anyhow.' Jimmy took a pick from the hands of an astonished laborer. 'Go to the shed and get another,' said Jimmy. Selden stood watching the two steam shovels gouge their way into the piles of broken rock and earth; the string of flat cars receiving the miniature avalanches from the flat steel claws of the giant beetles, the gangs of laborers strung along the line. Without being conscious of it, he laughed outright. It was a huge joke. A corporation digging silver ore from a hillside and dumping it into a ravine! He wondered why the powder men or the drill men hadn't discovered what they were doing. Jimmy Ryan touched his arm. 'All right, Ward.'

They climbed from the road-bed and toiled up the slope of the wooded hill. On the crest

they paused and, breathing hard, glanced down at the work below. Jimmy rather astonished Selden by remarking that 'The farther away from it you get, the more foolish it looks,' his gesture embracing the operations below.

As they made their way down the farther side of the hill, a deer leapt up and bounced away, its white flag flickering out of sight in a cluster of seedling pines. On the level beyond, Selden found a section-line stake, and estimated their level at about that of the right-of-way through the cut. 'Of course the vein may dip, or turn, or play out, anywhere between here and the cut,' he told Jimmy. 'I'm not a mining man. But try about here, Jimmy, and see if you can uncover any rock.' Jimmy pecked away at the soft black mould, scraped it aside, and, putting his back into each stroke, finally uncovered a reddish brown stratum of earth. 'If I had a shovel now,' he said as he straightened up. Selden picked up a handful of the earth and ran it through his fingers. Jimmy mopped the sweat from his face. 'Let me at it!' he cried exuberantly. 'I'm digging me way to a fortune.'

In a few minutes Jimmy had uncovered a hand's-breadth of mottled gray rock. Selden thought it was similar to the rock with which they had been making the fill. Farther along the base of the hill they found an outcropping of the rock. They took a few samples. When they had returned to the camp, with a few more bits of the rock picked up on the way, Selden cautioned Jimmy about talking or betraying any interest whatever in the material they were taking from the cut. If it were silver ore, some one else would discover the fact soon enough.

It was agreed that they would take their chief, McLean, into their confidence. It was Selden's suggestion. Jimmy Ryan wanted to include his friend the blacksmith. That evening the four held a conference in McLean's temporary headquarters. McLean examined the specimens of rock, said they looked like high-grade silver ore. If so, it meant a rush, a stampede, with no end of complications — a mining camp and a construction camp, together, with the inevitable speculation in land, quarreling, pilfering from the railroad, and delay to construction work. His job was to lay iron and push the

railroad through to the northern terminus. McLean was glad that Selden had made the discovery. Selden wouldn't talk about it. It would take but a word to put the camp into a turmoil, disorganize the work.

'Where are you going to send the samples?' he asked Selden.

'Detroit. That's the nearest assay office.'

'All right. I might suggest that you box it and take it down to the main line and ship it yourself. You might ask the assayers in Detroit to wire to the Junction and use our code. They'll know where to get it. Have it all done in your name.'

'Then, sir, we are to wait till we hear from the assayers?' queried Jimmy Ryan.

'We ought to hear from them within a week,' replied McLean. 'Personally I shan't do anything until we get their report.'

'What do you say, Mr. Selden?'

'It's your find, Jimmy. But we don't know how much of a find it is. Until we do, I think it would be a good idea to sit tight, and say nothing. We're here on the ground and can act quick when we hear from the assayers.'

The blacksmith, Forbes, took his pipe

from his mouth, as though about to speak. He glanced from Selden to McLean, his deep-set black eyes glowing through tobacco smoke like smouldering sparks from his own forge. It was all very well for the big boss and Selden to say 'sit tight.' They were pulling down big money. All they had to do was to walk up and down the line and say, 'Drill, ye terriers, drill!' And the terriers drilled. But suppose the find should amount to something, and somebody stepped in and filed on the best land before the original discoverers of the ore had a chance to drive a stake? Who would be the loser? The laboring man, as usual. McLean and Selden would keep on drawing down big pay, just the same. Forbes was half inclined to suspect the motives of McLean and his assistant in suggesting any delay at all in filing on the land. He wanted to suspect them, but he couldn't, because he knew them to be honorable.

'What do you say, Forbes?' Jimmy asked the question merely as a matter of form.

The blacksmith rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. 'Whatever suits you, Jimmy, suits me.'

McLean nodded. 'Guess that's about all there is to it, until we get a report from Detroit.'

Jimmy Ryan and the blacksmith rose. Selden was about to follow them from the room when McLean called him back. Together they bent over a blue-print on the drafting table. Jimmy Ryan and Forbes crossed the track and were halfway to the main camp when Jimmy swung round. 'Let's take a stroll up the line,' he said.

They passed the ghostly tents and shacks of the camp, the mules and horses lined along the feed racks, the supply shed where the night watchman's lantern shone, a bright red star in the darkness.

Beyond the sounds of the camp, Forbes stopped, filled and lighted his pipe. 'Mebby they're right,' he said. 'But I'm taking no chances.'

'What do you mean, Jack?'

'I mean, file on all the land you can, accordin' to law. And file right now! That's what I'm going to do. And if things don't turn out like we think, there's no harm done. I've let one or two good chances slip, in my time, but I'm not going to miss this one.'

'Well, now, and how would you go at it?' queried Jimmy. 'What I mean is, how would you go at it without showing your hand to somebody?'

'As if I hadn't sharpened enough diamond drills to know! I told you I'd missed a couple of chances — in Colorado, it was. Had a helper that made fifty thousand dollars in one week. Mac and young Selden are all right, but every shovelful of rock that goes into the fill from now on is just one more chance that somebody'll get wise.'

'But that's just talk, now. What would ye do, yourself?'

'What would I do? And the section lines all surveyed and staked out as plain as white-wash? I'd stake out my claim, and slip down to Northport and file on it, right now!'

'But ye'd have to be leaving your job, eh?'

'I'd lay off a week. Mike can handle the work, all right.'

'Well, I have no Mike to handle my work, and I couldn't be laying off right now with things like they are. But mebby it would do no harm if you was to slip down to Northport and put your name to the book in the

land office. I am thinking, meself, that the big boss and Selden was not excited at all, considering. If ye was to slip down to Northport and file on the land quiet like, it would do no harm, as I can see. If the stuff was hid in the ground, somewhere, and I had stumbled onto a bit of it, like. But with the drills and the picks and shovels turning it over every minute of the day!'

'Besides, it's your find,' asserted the blacksmith. 'You've got the say.'

'And for once I never felt less like saying than I do now. There's a chance to make a grand mistake. Two of us are for waiting till them fellows in Detroit make their report. And two of us are for not waiting. Now there's but one way to break such a deadlock.' Jimmy Ryan felt in his pocket, fetched up a coin, shook it in his cupped hands. 'Call the turn, Jack. And light a match.'

'Heads we file,' said the blacksmith.

The match flared and flickered. Jimmy uncovered the coin in his hollowed hand.

'There's your answer!' exclaimed Forbes.

CHAPTER III

A WEEK passed — two weeks, and Ward Selden had heard nothing from the assayers. Meanwhile, Forbes had returned from a six-day visit in Northport, his leave of absence granted without question, as he was an excellent workman and seldom took any time off. Following the blacksmith's return, Jimmy Ryan approached Selden in regard to the advisability of waiting any longer for a report from the assay office. Selden admitted that the delay puzzled him, in fact had begun to worry him. He suggested that Jimmy wait one more day; then if no word came from Detroit, he would advise filing their claims immediately.

Jimmy's hard, ruddy face bore a peculiar expression as he gazed at the young engineer. 'You haven't staked out a claim, have ye, Ward?'

'Why, no! I would hardly step in ahead of you.'

'And Mac hasn't, either?'

'Without saying anything to us? Hardly, Jimmy.'

'Nor any of your friends, or McLean's?'

'Why, hell, no! Jimmy, what's wrong?'

'Somebody, Ward. Did ye notice any strangers around, recent?'

'Only those four hunters and their guides that came in a day or two ago. They said they were heading for the Nennassing.'

'Nennassing is it? The six of 'em are camped just over the hill from the cut — or they were. Two of 'em are there yet. The other four went back to Northport on the work train, yesterday. Two to guard the corner stakes they drove, and four to file on the claims. And ye ask me what's wrong!'

'Claims? You mean — but how did they know?' Selden lowered his voice, seized Jimmy by the arm.

Jimmy Ryan laughed. 'Now I never thought it was you, Ward, or the boss. And I know it wasn't Forbes or meself. You remember you said we'd have a report from them assayers in Detroit, by the end of the week. And it's the end of two weeks and going on three. Now if I was you —'

'Wait a minute! Did either Forbes or you file on any of that section opposite the cut?'

'Did we? We did!'

'Did you have any witnesses?'

'Two, besides ourselves. They been wondering ever since what we'd be wanting with a farm on that kind of land. One of them is Forbes's brother-in-law, and the other is my time-keeper. Catch either of them boys talking, 'specially when we told 'em to say nothing about our homesteading or they might spoil the deal.'

'Then that's why Forbes went to Northport?'

'It is. I was out hunting deer, three days, meself. You see, Ward, it was not that Jack Forbes and meself was trying to get ahead of you and McLean,' said Jimmy. 'It was just that we figured to take no chances. After Jack came back from Northport, I went down there meself and recorded, all quiet and regular. It was not us that started this rush.'

Selden heaved a sigh of relief. Jimmy and Forbes had wisely taken care of themselves. Selden cursed fervently, softly. The assayers had tricked him, holding back their report until their friends could investigate conditions and file on the land. He was dis-

appointed, disgusted, so disgusted in fact that he would not listen to Jimmy's reiterated suggestion that he still had a good chance to secure a valuable claim.

'I balled it all up,' said Selden. 'I trusted those sharks in Detroit, and virtually asked you fellows to trust them. I might have ruined your chances. Mine don't count. But I must see McLean, right away.'

Donald McLean, however, had been called to the Junction and would not be back until evening. Selden tried to get his chief on the local telephone, but the line was out of order. He examined the batteries, tried the line again. He was still trying to get the Junction when he heard a locomotive whistle. Either McLean, coming up on a special, or the supply train. Selden stepped from the camp office. Again the whistle of the locomotive resounded through the woodlands. The train drew up to the unloading platform; the supply and materials train, but bearing a most peculiar cargo. From each flat car, gondola, and box car poured a stream of men — men of all shapes and sizes, and as variously clad. And along with this stream of humanity came boxes, bags,

packages, and bundles; rolled blankets, tents, axes, here and there a rifle, duffle-bags evidently stuffed with spare clothing, cases of provisions, new rope, new tarpaulins and ponchos. Selden stared, frowned, and shrugged his shoulders. He did not pretend to himself that he was surprised. The rush was on. Within forty-eight hours there would be a new town in the wilderness.

Selden shouldered through the crowd round the unloading platform and talked with the conductor of the supply train. He learned that the train had been virtually commandeered at the Junction — by a mob that was quite willing to pay its fare, or quite as willing to take possession of the train and run it themselves. Inquiring as to the whereabouts of McLean, Selden learned that his chief had taken a train over to Ransome, on the main line west of the Junction; that the crowd had arrived from the east — most of them from Detroit, the conductor stated.

Led by two or three who seemed to know what they were doing, the mob poured past the unloading platform and on up the track. The conductor gave Selden some mail, then

called to his train crew. Within a few minutes the train crew had joined the rush. Selden walked over to the camp office. In the mail he found a letter addressed to himself. It was from the assayers, apologizing for the delay in sending their report. The report showed the samples submitted ran exceedingly high in silver. Selden studied the analysis. There was something in the combination of minerals that bothered him. He recalled his laboratory work. He penciled some figures on the margin of a blue-print. Presently he arose and went out, seeking Jimmy Ryan. He found him on the grade beyond the cut, talking with Forbes. They were discussing the recent invasion. Selden showed them the letter from the assayers. 'High-grade stuff,' he said. 'But that isn't all. There's another joker in the deck. Just how the big money will play is a question. But I know this. The analysis of our samples shows a combination of minerals with silver that cannot be separated from them except by one smelter in the United States. And the freight rate to that smelter would eat up all the profits. It's high-grade ore, all right. But the

combination of minerals is peculiar. If I had your holdings, I'd wait until I got a big offer and then sell. Big money will get control, eventually, and probably build a smelter, right here. Meanwhile the speculators will drift in. Unload, Jimmy.'

'That's just what me and Jack was thinking, as we seen the mob coming in. The first man with fifty thousand dollars real money can have my claim. I dunno how much Jack wants for his, but that's his business.'

Selden went back to the camp office, tried the telephone again. It was still out of order. He felt that he had done all that he could in warning Jimmy and the blacksmith about the quality of the ore. He realized that he had missed a big opportunity himself — at least an opportunity to gamble heavily. As for getting into the game now, that was out of the question. He would not tag along with the crowd. Hang the crowd and its wild scramble!

Selden searched among his things, and found the old map of the Nennassing country. At once he lost himself in studying it. The light grew dim. He heard the clanging of the triangle at the chuck house. He

folded and thrust the map into his pocket. Just a few weeks before he had visioned a journeying up into the Nennassing country. Then had come the discovery of the silver.

CHAPTER IV

It was early morning when Ward Selden entered the chief engineer's quarters, and, much to the latter's amazement, tendered his resignation. The chief demurred. He liked Selden.

'See here, Ward,' he said kindly, 'I know this country is pretty wild and lonesome, but you might as well stay till we all go out. We're nearly through up here.

'I've thought about all that,' said Selden. 'You've given me a clean report so far. You passed the work in the cut, and that was my last job.'

'Yes,' said McLean crisply. 'And if we hadn't struck that vein of silver — and if we had followed the first survey we'd have missed it by a mile — you wouldn't talk about quitting. But I can understand how you feel. You missed a big chance. I'll admit I didn't think you'd give in so quick, though, when you found out the Detroit crowd had tricked us. I thought you'd fight. Why didn't you take a chance on making

a few thousand, anyway, even if we were crowded off the ground floor?'

'I had made up my mind to quit before we struck the silver,' Selden replied. 'I had been thinking about it . . . intended to give you notice, of course . . . you'll be through up here in two months. You've got the job whipped, and you're a good three weeks ahead of the estimate. I'd only be in the way, from now, on.'

Donald McLean, heavy-shouldered, keen-eyed, glanced out of the cabin window. 'Well,' he said at length, 'have it your way. I suppose you're going South?'

Selden shook his head. 'I'm not going out,' he replied.

The engineer shifted in his chair and gazed at the younger man. 'Got the woods fever, Ward?'

Selden colored, but his eyes did not waver. 'Something like that.'

McLean leaned back in his chair. 'I know. That is what makes it difficult to talk you in to staying. There's nothing definite to adjust. But we can use you, if you'll stay.'

Selden, gazing at the other, again shook his head.

'Well, Ward, I'll O.K. anything you may have to turn in. You know how to get me in town, if you care to tackle another job with us.'

Selden shook hands with McLean, and presently strode from the building into the sunlight of the pleasant June morning.

He squared his shoulders, breathed deeply and struck out briskly for his own camp.

Overworked, overtired, he was for the moment incompetent to focus properly his own position in resigning from work that had paid him well and that had been well done. In reality, his condition was due to a natural revulsion of feeling toward the rigid mechanical excellence of engineering. He felt in some indefinite way that he was guilty of a kind of treason in deserting the all but completed work on the new railroad. He had rendered faithful service to the company. McLean, with Celtic shrewdness, weighed and understood his assistant's condition of mind. With liberal forethought, the older man refrained from urging the younger to stay, knowing that he would make good eventually, wherever placed.

'I feel now as though I had the whole

North Country to myself, for once,' said Selden, as he arrived at his camp. 'And just as soon as I put this branch of the Transcontinental behind me a hundred miles or so, I'm going to holler and loud and long. Then I'll feel better.'

Next afternoon, with a sparsely equipped pack, he struck westward through the unspoiled forest. Far from the raw, red rails of the new road, he rested on a rise of ground, studying a map until the haze of twilight startled him to action.

With the last glow of sunset, he pitched his tiny tent and prepared supper. After supper he smoked. There was nothing to ruffle the placid surface of his solitary content. As it grew darker his fire's quick, cheerful blaze became as a companion, sympathetic with his optimism. He planned great things, gazing across the dwindling embers of his neglected fire. Near him the clustered columns of the spruce grew rigidly distinct as the summer moon drew slowly up the sky. From erstwhile unfathomable depths of nothingness, giant trees sprang into being with awesome swiftness. Indistinct masses of gray moss became instantly

beautiful with a moonlit radiance, mysterious and unreal. Overhead, the bulked branches seemed to draw apart, the blackness round them melting to the dim edges of their clustered tops. A fanciful filigree of web and woof — the myriad twigs and needle-pointed leaves of pine and fir — spread in keen tracery against a silvery curtain edged with blue and pricked with stars.

The last embers of the fire melted to gray ash. A little wand of smoke drew up, thin and straight. Meeting a faint midnight breeze, it quivered, threading its wavering course through an angle of moonlight. Selden gazed at it, smiling in the sheer contentment of his isolation. Presently he rose and stretched sleepily. As he did so, a shape paced across an illumined opening and stood for a second with wide antlers thrown back and eyes glowing softly. An instant — a breath, and the shape was gone.

From overhead came the soft lisp of birch leaves in the summer wind. Selden rolled in his blankets. A gust of warm air lifted the dead ashes of his fire, then fled while the great gray flakes settled here and there like indolent butterflies. The moon dipped

slowly to the distant hills, rocked in a haze of blue, and vanished.

The Northland forest, brooding in somber, unslumbering majesty, seemed to await with myriad restless murmurings the coming of the dawn.

CHAPTER V

Methodically Selden packed his kit next morning, pausing once or twice to glance at the awakening sky. He noted with complacency the faint mist and heavy dew — harbingers of a hot day. His would be the shady trails of the forest — the untraveled wilderness — and not the blazing, rock-ballasted road-bed with its heat and toil.

Not altogether a theorist in woodcraft despite his somewhat romantic fondness for the wilderness, he planned his journey systematically, approximating each day's mileage and estimating each day's supplies. With pack of provisions, blankets, rifle, and axe, his outfit did not weigh over forty pounds. Naturally strong, he felt for the time being exceedingly fit, due to nervous excitement of which he was unconscious.

Setting his course, he strode briskly through the forest, consulting his compass infrequently, as the going was easy. The timbered plateau across which he journeyed would, he knew, drop off to ravines and hills

after the first few days' travel. These ravines and hills would, in turn, become the deeper valleys and mountains of the rugged North Country with its big timber, its cold blue lakes, and heavy, rapid streams.

Morning after morning he awoke to prepare a hasty meal, cord up his pack, and trudge on with a speed and determination that astonished himself. 'It's a big country! he exclaimed frequently. 'Big, and there's something big to be done up here.'

Quite sanely he realized that there were just as big things to be done in his home town. He did not gloze his reasoning with excuses to himself. Frankly he admitted that he was soul-sick of systematic toil and that his goddess Opportunity lurked oftenest in the city streets, but he longed to find her beyond the limitations of convention, beyond the reaches of most men. Well enough he knew her, this goddess Opportunity, knew that eventually he would find her on the bright highways of the city, or in the quiet, sumptuous offices of wealth, or perchance amid the wrangling din of anvils and the rush of steam, but gypsy-like he longed to find her, fresh and fair and young, a

dryad or a naiad of the great, evergreen solitudes.

His soul craved the romance that his technical training and its subsequent rigid application had denied him. He had served faithfully at a task he disliked. What could he not do should the task be to his liking?

Despite his physical activity and his engrossing reflections, the solitude was wearing him down. He caught himself talking aloud. He hurried. He hardly allowed himself the essential noon rest and food. He smoked and planned long into the night when he should have slept. Of a clean mind, and ordinarily fearless, yet it was the very essence of fear, the eternal questioning of silence that urged him on. He reasoned that his unrest was ambition, eagerness to explore the unknown where his goddess dwelt.

One morning he awoke to gaze into the valleys flanked by great hills heavily clad with the dusky green of distant fir and pine. The limpid mountain stream of yesterday, shallow, scarce covering the pebbles in its bed, became to-day's torrent in the valley. Fording it with pack and rifle held above his head, he was wet to the armpits.

Already he had been seven days on the way. From each rise of ground he had scanned the northern skyline for a hint of smoke or the gleam of raw planks that would mark the environs of the new lumber town of Newhall, his tentative destination. Nothing but the endless sweep of gray, rocky crests and green mountain-sides to the very haze of the horizon met his gaze. Many times he was about to fire at a deer, but he knew he could not use all of the meat, and his own supplies were sufficient.

'You must hurry! Hurry! Hurry!' an insistent voice reiterated.

'Why?' he would ask himself aloud.

'Hanged if I do!' he would exclaim, and then deliberately slacken his pace, thus stubbornly controverting the voice of his own unrealized fear.

His eyes showed lack of sleep, and at times had a startled expression, and for no apparent reason. By this time he was traveling on sheer moral grit. His physical being stood the ordeal well enough, and he would have reached his destination without mishap had he not relaxed his usual vigilance on the eighth day.

Crossing a trapper's line, he hesitated, consulted his compass, and finally swung from his set course, following the trail and looking for the blaze that he knew must be spotted somewhere on the trees ahead. He felt himself growing sleepy. Presently he stumbled, caught himself, and the jar sent a tingling from head to heels. 'Part of me is asleep,' he soliloquized. 'Wonder who traps up here? I'd like to talk to some one, if only in sign language. Hello! There's an old bear trap, or coop for the bait, at least.'

He stepped to one side to examine the little log hut in which the bait is usually secured.

'Can't be any trap around here. No one traps bear in June.'

Finding the beaten trail had relaxed the unnatural tension of his nerves, and with it his customary vigilance. Otherwise he would have noticed that the short log over which he had stumbled in the dead leaves was the drag, round one end of which was a chain, in turn linked to a rusted, unsprung, and moss-concealed bear trap.

He stepped backward to look for the trap before venturing down the trail. The leaves

and moss at his feet suddenly became animate, puffing up in a rustling cloud and falling away. The quick crunch of the huge steel jaws was almost soundless as they gripped his leg above the ankle. The 'offset' teeth of the trap bit deep into the tough leather of his high service boots. He dropped to his knees, groaning. In the first rush of fear he cried out for help. Then he worked round, and painfully slipped out of his pack-straps. His rifle lay close to him. He lifted it and fired three times rapidly. Then he lay back against his pack, white and sweating. Below the grip of the trap, his leg was becoming numb and swollen. He bit his lips, and drawing himself up tried to pry the jaws of the trap apart with his rifle. Then he remembered that he carried a small file in his kit. He found it, and began filing on the neck of one of the springs. 'It's tempered steel!' he kept repeating to himself. 'It'll take hours to file through that — and then there's the other side.'

Nevertheless he gritted his teeth and went at it, unheeding the twilight that brought with it the quick chill of the Northern night.

'If I only had water — I'm burning up!'

He shivered, and was about to begin filing again when a something, bulking darker than the dusk of the trail ahead, caught his eye. He dropped the file and raised his rifle. But he lowered it quickly as a voice, girlish and musical, said slowly: 'You could see to shoot me better if you was standin' up. I heard you shoot a while back — so I come over — wonderin' ——'

'Perhaps I could,' replied Selden, and his voice sounded far away to himself. 'But I'm caught — in — a bear trap. Better — help me ——'

He was conscious of a startled cry and then quick hands that lowered his head against the pack. The pain ceased and he felt himself drifting down — down into a velvet blackness that lay across his face and smothered him.

CHAPTER VI

SELDEN'S eyes opened. Directly above him were the stars, doubly intensified by the utter darkness that curtained all save the narrow pathway of the sky toward which he gazed. Slowly his awakening senses distinguished a dim figure that sat at his feet; a figure that swayed rhythmically. He felt a tiny spatter of water on his face. He put out his hand, and touched the broad ribs of a canoe. He knew he was going downstream as the canoe met no resistance, was free from thrust motion. For a long time a kind of comfortable indifference bound him to silence. Then he endeavored to raise himself. The effort awoke the numbed nerves of his injured leg, and he dropped back.

'Where are you taking me? Who are you? I can't see three feet ahead of me.'

'I can't neither,' replied a voice melodious with an undercurrent of laughter.

'You're a girl!' he exclaimed.

This time his answer was a wordless melody, low and unmistakably feminine.

Selden frowned. He could not appreciate the necessity for laughing just then, or being laughed at. The girl, interpreting his silence, added hastily:

"'Course I'm a girl. Been one ever since I could recollect. I'm Sunny Mateel. I lugged you down to the canoe. I dropped you, too — but you didn't know that.' She sighed. 'You'll be weighin' close to a hundred and eighty pounds, I reckon. I'm feelin' sorry that you got ketched in our bear trap.'

'You seem to be,' replied Selden. Then, a bit ashamed of his speech, he added: 'Pretty good guess at my weight.'

'I've lugged enough deer to know,' said the girl, swinging steadily to the paddle.

Selden shifted his position. He bit his lips that she might not hear him groan. 'Where does this adventure end?' he asked presently. 'How badly am I hurt?'

'Oh, you ain't hurt turrible bad. Dad'll fix you up. He's first-rate at doctorin' cuts and sech.' The girl paused, holding the paddle clear of the water for a moment. 'This ain't no adventure — if you're meanin' like story-books. I'm jest a-takin' you to our camp to get fixed up, same as I

would any livin' thing that was hurt — and warn't good to eat.'

Despite his pain Selden laughed outright. 'You're somewhat of a humorist. Now anything that *was* good to eat?'

'If it was hurt bad — why, I'd jest snick it with my knife and stop its sufferin', and then take what was fit to eat home. We do need fresh meat. Dad ain't got a deer for quite a spell.'

'How far are we from Newhall?' asked Selden.

''Bout two days. But I can't talk to you no more. Round this next bend is the Ox Bow Rips, and I never run 'em at night before — so I got to watch out.'

Selden could hear the faint murmur of disturbed waters; a murmur that grew to a reverberating 'boom' as they swept round a sharp bend. He felt a slight twitch, and recognized the tug of a speeding current. Then the low booming grew still louder.

'Don't risk it on my account,' he called.

'You scared?' the girl asked quickly.

'Scared? No!' he shouted. 'Go as far as you like.'

Suddenly, but with that soft, mysterious

glow, that suggestion of having been ever present but invisible, the full moon burned clear and white on the black water. It spread in a wide silver path that softly illumined the tossing tide below and ethereal-ized the graceful figure now standing in the stern of the canoe.

With the first thrust of her paddle as the little canoe entered the rapids, Selden knew the girl had complete mastery of the craft. Despite the dip and lift of the canoe and the quick, staggering shock of dropping sideways — to straighten again instantly downstream, and above all the rush and rumble of the 'rips,' Selden had no fear, but gazed intently at the girl's face. Pale she seemed in the moonlight, pale perhaps in contrast to the night black of her hair. He wondered at the lithe swiftness with which her arms flashed from side to side. He could feel the quick jump of the canoe as she threw her weight into a stroke to stem a cross-current or meet a lifting wave.

'Perhaps she's the real naiad — or a dryad loosed from her tree. But this moonlight would make any girl enchanting. The good old sunlight is the real test. But what's

the difference? We do like 'em pretty, though!' he exclaimed as if smitten with a very original thought. And he realized that they were in still water and that he had spoken aloud.

'Like what's pretty?' queried the girl.

'Oh, girls,' blurted Selden defiantly. 'I didn't mean to speak.'

'Girls?' she queried slowly.

'Yep.' And Selden grinned in the dark.

'Well, I'm not going to laugh. You thought I would. But I got you on my hands — with that leg — and it *is* chawed up pretty bad. Then dad's over to Newhall and won't be home till to-morrow. And, besides' — and the girl hesitated — 'you ain't told me your name or what you be. I said I was Sunny Mateel ——'

'I beg your pardon. I forgot that part of it. My name is Selden — Ward Selden, civil engineer. Just left the new Transcontinental — Northern branch. I'm sorry to have got mixed up in your bear trap. Sorry I've made you all this trouble ——'

'Trouble!' exclaimed the girl, laughing. 'This here's fun!'

'Oh — is it?' queried Selden ironically.

The girl became suddenly grave. 'Now I'm beggin' *your* pardon,' she said slowly. 'I meant that findin' you there — that — oh, just to have somethin' new and different happen — somethin' to do, makes me happy like. I think I like takin' care of folks that's hurt or sick. We ain't never sick, though.'

'That's good,' said Selden, smiling.

'Dad says I'm happy all the time. He called me Sunny first. But he don't allus know. Thinks when I'm singin' or whistlin' I'm happy. He says my chirrupin' makes him feel good. But it's awful lonesome sometimes.'

'Just to hear you laugh would cheer up any one. You've really done a whole lot for me already.'

Sunny Mateel laughed softly, quite unconscious that she was laughing. 'Reckon I have done a lot for you. Ketched you in a bear trap first time you come a-callin'. Then dropped you luggin' you down to the canoe. Then resked drowndin' you in the Ox Bow. And now I'm wonderin'' — and she ceased speaking as she ran the canoe ashore — 'jest wonderin' if you ain't pretty

nigh mad at me and dad? It was our trap you was ketched in.'

'Not a bit of it!' replied Selden as she helped him from the canoe. 'It was an accident, pure and simple. I was to blame for poking around instead of attending to my business. But you needn't go to any trouble. I can sleep anywhere. I have blankets, and I'm used to roughing it.'

'Here's our camp,' she said. 'You need help. Lean on me and I'll help you up the trail. It's only a short spell now.'

Slowly they climbed the path to the cabin. Halfway up Selden gasped and staggered. He felt the warmth of her strong young arm about his shoulder. 'I'm all right now, Miss Mateel.'

'My name's Sunny,' she replied quickly. 'And you ain't all right, neither.'

When they had entered the cabin and she stood in the full glow of the lamplight, Selden half smothered an exclamation. The girl was actually beautiful. Intent on making him comfortable, she failed to notice his astonishment, but eased him to the big armchair, bolstered it up with

blankets and pillows, and, kindling a fire, made tea and fried some of the inevitable bacon and potatoes.

After they had eaten, she bathed and bandaged his injured leg. 'Dad'll fix it up better when he comes,' she explained. 'He knows just how strong to make the yerbs to heal it up.'

'Thank you,' he said, settling in the comfortable chair and leaning back wearily.

'I reckon I'll go to bed,' she said presently, as she put a stick of wood in the stove and adjusted the damper. 'I'll leave some fire, for you mebby'll get chilled some toward mornin'. If you need anything jest call and I'll come.'

'Good-night,' said Selden as she stood before him for an instant. 'Won't you shake hands? You're a bully good fellow!'

'Sure!' exclaimed Sunny, with a boyishness and *camaraderie* that was good to see.

For awhile Selden sat gazing out of the window. Slowly his overwrought nerves quieted and his eyes closed, only to blink open again as the pain of his injured leg

throbbed spasmodically. 'Naiad!' he murmured. 'Pretty! Huh! "Pretty" is an insult. The girl is outrageously beautiful — and she doesn't know it, either.'

CHAPTER VII

With a cheery morning greeting Sunny Mateel entered the camp kitchen where Selden lay propped up in the big chair.

Taking the two buckets from the bench near the door, she disappeared up the little trail toward the spring. Selden rubbed his eyes, so quickly had she passed in her noiseless moccasins. 'Pail's gone,' he said. 'And I'm awake — blame the leg!' He grinned nevertheless. The 'romance' he had craved seemed nearer than ever before. 'Let me see,' he soliloquized. 'We'll call this Act One. Scene: Morning in the Mountains. Trapper's Cabin. Hero seated in father's armchair with chewed leg. Enter Wood Nymph fresh from a — a — well, I suppose, it's a feather bed. We'll call it a "downy couch" to preserve the flavor of romance. Nymph takes buckets and then disappears, left, tripping o'er the lea. No, she didn't trip, either. She walks sensibly and naturally. Let's see. Ouch! I can't use this leg, that's certain.'

He settled back in his chair. 'Well, I left the Wood Nymph at the spring. What next?'

He was answered by the heavy, soft *pad pad* of moccasins on the cabin porch. 'That's either a grizzly or her father, judging from the step. Whew!'

A shadow fell across the doorway, and Selden glanced up to meet the gaze of the biggest man he had ever seen. He hastened to explain his position.

'Good-morning! I don't belong here. Got caught in your bear trap. Your daughter found me. Helped me to get here. Sorry to inconvenience you. My name's Selden. Miss Mateel has gone to the spring ——'

'Reckon you've told me the whole story,' interrupted the big man, slipping a great pack from his shoulders and entering the cabin. 'I feel pow'ful tender about your gettin' ketched in that there trap. Me and Sunny knowed where it was. I ought to took it out this spring. Got by me somehow. But, bless my buttins, if I don't make it up to you. Hurtin' you much?'

Selden shook his head. 'Pretty stiff and sore. Wish you would tell me when I'll be able to get around again.'

'Well, I'm your doctor, and I'll have you spry enough to ketch a weasel by next week — if the bone ain't hurt none. What you say your name was?'

'Selden — Ward Selden. I'm from the new railroad. Been working as engineer — civil engineer.'

'I reckoned you was one of them surveyin' fellers by your clothes. My name's Mateel, Jed Mateel. I'm Sunny's pa and do trappin' likewise.'

The great gray-bearded figure stooped and examined Selden's injured leg. 'No bones tetched. Muscles ain't cut much, and the cord at the back ain't even scratched. That was what I was afeared of. I can fix you up quick. Hello! Here's Sunny!'

The girl set down the pails and ran to her father. 'Dad,' she said, 'he ain't hurt bad, is he?'

'No-o-o. You bile some water and git some bandages and my box of yerbs.' Then he turned to Selden. 'Where'd you say you was from — the new road, mebby?'

'Yes. I was on my way to Newhall.'

'Uhuh. Your gettin' ketched in that trap makes me think of Uncle Clem Putter's

b'ar trap and a city feller. The feller hired Uncle Clem to guide for him — now this here'll smart a leetle — and the man walked right plumb into one of Uncle Clem's traps. He was some mad, too, but Uncle Clem he fixed him up, and when the city feller got so'st he could walk and was a-goin' home, Clem took him over and showed him another b'ar trap, all set and ready. "Now," says Uncle Clem, "I reckon to make it up to you for gettin' ketched in the first trap. Don't you go to steppin' in this one or you'll get ketched ag'in. Now I figure you're not gettin' ketched in this one makes us even."

'The city feller was some mad. He up and cussed Uncle Clem somethin' pow'ful for a man what wore eyeglasses and collars, and he asked Clem if he thunk he was a ijjit.

'Uncle Clem he jest h'isted his braces with his thumbs and ses, ses he, "No-o-o," kind of slow-like, "but there's no tellin' but what you might." Uncle Clem's moughty close in his dealin's,' added Mateel as he finished bandaging Selden's leg. 'Thar now. In a week all you'll ever know about bein' ketched in that trap'll be a leetle stiffness.

And don't you worry any about bein' a bother to us. We're glad to have you.'

After breakfast Mateel helped Selden to the porch, and later the woodsman made him a makeshift crutch. 'Now you can limp around some,' said Mateel, standing the crutch against the porch timbers. 'Reckon Sunny'll be right glad to talk to you. She gits lonesome-like, howbe she never says so. Now I got to do a leetle ploddin' in the garden patch. Weeds is poppin' up like school children comin' out at recess.'

A few days later Selden, who sat watching the old man shape a setting pole, asked suddenly: 'Are you pretty busy this time of year, Mr. Mateel?'

'Nothin' to sweat on,' replied the old man. 'Why?'

'Well, I thought I'd ask you a few questions about Newhall, and about getting there. You see, I'm a free lance — just prospecting for something to do. I understand that the Newhall Company has had trouble about the water rights ——'

'Uhuh. Ezra Newhall he sent for me to come up there. He owns that company, body and soul and buildin's. He ain't been

able to get a man to tend dam nights sence Tommy Crogan was shot by the Canucks. He offered me the job, at good wages, too — for summer. He even h'isted in the insinooation that I was scared to take it when I said I didn't want it. But I got other reasons for not, and I got Sunny to take care of likewise.'

'Well,' said Selden, 'I walked from Nennassing, on the new road, this far to get to Newhall and find something to do; something a little out of the ordinary.'

'Ye did?' And Jed Mateel's blue eyes expressed approval mixed with a touch of humor. 'Well, that's a pow'ful long jaunt, goin' it alone. So you come acrost the divide? And you're lookin' for a job "a leetle out of the ordinary," you say? Well, Newhall's the place to find it.'

Selden nodded, glancing at Sunny, who flushed as she realized that he had caught her watching him.

'If you're lookin' for that job you might get suited to Newhall. Reckon you know the Canucks blowed up the dam with dynamite and shot Tommy Crogan — killed him — and nary a track of 'em to trail 'em

by. They took to their canoes and run the Nennassing River into Canady. Now Ezra Newhall's lookin' hard for a man for thet job — of tendin' dam at nights sence it's been built up ag'in. It cost the company a pile of money to build her over. She was a big dam.'

'One of the biggest in the United States, I believe,' said Selden.

'I reckon so. But say, it ain't no money for you. Only seventy-five a month and found. 'Course that's good money for us ——'

'I don't care particularly about the wage. I want to get started with the company. I understand they're cutting more timber than any other lumber company up North.'

'Y-a-a-s. But the Canady company, the Saint John's folks, runs 'em clost for gettin' out timber. These here lumberin' concerns is cuttin' too much timber. Folks in years to come is goin' to curse 'em for it. Why, even I can see the difference in the big rivers sence I lived here. They're dryin' up — slow ——'

Sunny came out on the cabin porch attired in a clean fresh gingham. Selden glanced up,

and his eyes were filled with unconscious admiration for the girl.

'Huh!' grunted Mateel. 'You smell jest as fresh as goin' to camp meetin'.'

'I'd have to wait a long time for my dad to take me,' she said, glancing at Selden.

'I reckon you would,' said her father positively. 'These here woods and rivers and storms and sunshine and them things is my camp meetin's. Every day here is as good as Sunday anywhere else, I take it. Good folks makes camp meetin's, mebby, but camp meetin's don't allus make folks good. But you said, was I busy this time of year?' he added, turning to Selden.

The young man nodded. 'It will be a week before I'll be able to get about. Could you manage to get me to Newhall by canoe?'

'Reckon I could — or Sunny could,' said Mateel.

'You thinkin' of takin' the watchin' *nights?*' asked Sunny presently, becoming grave and looking down at her dress.

'Yes, if I can get it.'

'They'll shoot you — them Canucks,' she said slowly. 'They shot Tom Crogan 'cause

he tried to stop 'em from dynamitin' the dam. Can't you take to nothin' else in the woods besides *that* job?'

'I haven't any experience, except in railroad work and construction. Of course I shall be glad to get anything for a start. But that job seems to be going begging for a man. And I'm the man, if they'll have me.'

'You can't tell what will happen,' said Mateel. 'Mebby you would do first-rate. There's such a thing as luck. Why, oncet Uncle Clem's cat nearly led to him gettin' his head chopped off, fer a fact!'

'Now, dad ——' began Sunny.

'I warn't there,' continued Mateel, waving his daughter's interruption aside with a broad gesture. 'If I'd 'a' been there I mought 'a' learned some good new, long-handled, double-bitted cuss words to save up for a special happenin'. Uncle Clem, what lives down the trail a spell toward Newhall, comes into his cabin with a chin-high armful of wood one day and he stepped on the cat layin' by the stove. Wood was so high he couldn't see over it. Well, he'd jest fixed up a kind of pantry business for Aunt Lib, all leetle doors and cupboards and sech,

and bein' middlin' good with tools, had made them basswood doors right thin and handy; panels no thicker'n a good piece of birch bark. Well, when he stepped on the cat it sort of upsot his reckonin' for the next step, and he pitched blim-blam, head first, through one of them cupboard doors. There he was a-kickin' and tryin' to pull his head out again, and the cat was settin' up on the top shelf a-spittin' and fussin', and Aunt Lib was scared to death. She says the only thing that saved Clem from a sudden visitation of Providence or paralysis was his head bein' inside the cupboard. It kind of smothered the worst of the cussin', I reckon. Anyhow, Aunt Lib she dug Clem out, and the door come along with him, bein' screwed to nothin' but them leetle brass hinges. Clem's winter cap was all that saved his brains, I reckon. His head ain't any too hard.'

'Yes,' said Sunny, laughing with Selden. 'It did happen. They haven't painted the new door yet. I was up to Aunt Lib's last week. She ain't my real aunt, jest 'dopted me, she says.'

Mateel, who had been sitting on the porch step, arose and lighted his pipe. His blue

eyes twinkled. 'Come purty nigh bein' a serious thing for Uncle Clem. Aunt Lib couldn't get the door offen his neck. She made him go out and kneel down by the choppin' block so'st to chop off the remains of the door — and him swearin' all the time — when along come Ezra Newhall's gal, Elvira Newhall. She seen Aunt Lib with the axe up over Uncle Clem's head, and she screamed. That, and Uncle Clem's langige kind of mixed Aunt Lib, and she nicked Clem's ear a leetle with the axe. That sot him to swearin' ag'in real strong and healthy. Ezra Newhall's gal got up from that faintin' spell that she put on, mighty lively. Clem's lazy, but not so turrible lazy when it comes to cussin'.'

'Now, dad, you know the last part of that ain't so,' said Sunny.

Jed Mateel raised his shaggy eyebrows. 'Ain't so? Why, you can see the new door and a nick in the axe any time you go by Clem's place. And the axe handle is all warped out of plumb owin' to the heat of Clem's langige ——'

Mateel paused. 'Go git my rifle — quick!' he whispered.

Sunny sprang into the cabin, and returned with the rifle. Mateel drew it up slowly, and just as Selden saw a brown patch down by the river, a patch that seemed to melt into the surrounding brush, the little rifle barked.

'Got him!' said Mateel, handing the rifle to Sunny. 'Got him through the shoulders, by the way he went down.'

Selden spoke before he realized what he was saying. 'It's June ——' he began, then checked himself.

'And they ain't no stockyards or no meat markets or no game laws for quite a few steps from here,' said Mateel, unruffled. 'Howcome, if I ketched a sport killin' deer just for killin' and not because he needed the meat — why, I'd take him over to the warden's shack myself.'

'It was a splendid shot, and the longest kill I've ever seen,' said Selden.

'Yes,' said Mateel simply as he reached for the knife in his belt. 'Yes, it was a pretty good shot. That leetle thirty-thirty carries up good, but you ought to see my boy Joe shoot. I'm jest a-lookin' on when he takes up the rifle.'

As Selden hobbled down toward the river to watch the old man cut up the deer, Mateel spoke: 'Them Canucks is mighty good shots, most of 'em. Now from what I could figure out, the feller what shot Tom Crogan was one of the best of 'em. He drilled old Tommy jest between the eyes. It was moonlight, but a man's forehead, bein' mushroom white at night, kind of wavers and jigs around like when you look at it over the front bead.'

CHAPTER VIII

Jed Mateel, his sleeves rolled to his elbows and the neck of his flannel shirt unbottoned, sat with chair tilted back against the outside wall of the cabin. The night was warm. Mateel smoked his short pipe with unusual deliberation between each puff. He gazed out across the meadow to the evening hills that glowed with the soft fire of sunset. Finally he dropped his chair forward, arose, and stepped into the cabin, returning in a few minutes with a letter. Slowly he read and re-read it, until twilight blurred the lines. He heaved a great sigh, carefully folded the letter, and, glancing about, reached up and tucked it securely between the topmost log of the wall and the roof edge.

'I can't jest swaller it all to once,' he muttered. 'Maybe I ought to tear it up. But I want to read that letter ag'in afore I either tell Sunny or don't tell her.'

For a long time he stood gazing toward the river. 'It's jest plain murder — not killin',

but murder ——' he said finally. 'And my boy Joe — they can't be no mistake now — he done it. Folks'll say "Jed Mateel's son"; and I ain't never seen the inside of a jail. 'Course fist fightin' comes natural to any man — but shootin' a man ——'

The old man reached toward the hidden letter. He hesitated as the sound of voices and a girlish laugh came to him from the river. 'There's Sunny now,' he said, 'jest havin' the sprightenist kind of a time with that young Selden. He's a good, solid, straight kind of a boy, but I wisht he was gone. It's onginerous, I know, but every day he's here is goin' to mean a month of thinkin' and wonderin' for Sunny. She never met his kind afore, and he's like to fill her head with ideas of betterin' herself and sech. Not a-pu'pose, mebby, but jest like ketchin' the measles. That allus means city life, and city life ain't for Sunny or me. It seems like nowadays folks ain't never satisfied to be jest as they be. Allus wantin' to better themselves — which mostly means gettin' round-shouldered, shortsighted, and losin' the taste for plain food — and dyin' when they ain't half through livin' yet.'

Again came Sunny's laugh, as melodious as a song, in the June evening.

Jed Mateel smiled, despite the lugubrious tenor of his soliloquy. 'If folks wants to better themselves, why don't they stay where God put 'em, and commence the good work by tryin' to be honest and chirpy, and helpin' the other feller that's down? There's a mighty lot of improvin' to be did that-a-way, afore folks needs high learnin' and sech. And they can do it right where they be, without movin' to town or goin' in debt for things they don't need. Uhuh. But my conscience is gettin' tol'able long-winded to-night. Reckon I'll commence improvin' myself by takin' things as they be and makin' the best of 'em. Charity ain't the only thing what begins at home. But my boy Joe ——'

The old man entered the cabin, lighted the lamp, and sat for a while, pondering. As the sound of voices drew nearer, he got up and went to his own room. 'I can't hardly face her to-night, knowin' what I know, and she bein' so happy.'

Up the trail through the June evening came Sunny and Ward Selden, the latter

hobbling along on his improvised crutch.

'Dad's gone to bed,' said Sunny. 'And it's just too pretty a night for to go to bed. You feelin' all right, dad?' she called.

'Uhuh,' came from the inner room.

'Dad gets fits of goin' to bed early, or settin' up readin' the Bible ever since my brother Joe went to Canady,' whispered Sunny, as if excusing her father's absence to Selden.

'Your brother Joe?'

'Yes.' And Sunny nodded. 'He's to work for the Saint John's Company, lumberin'. You was sayin' dad was a good shot with the rifle, but you ought to see Joe. Folks says he's the best shot and the daringest canoe-man in this country.'

'I'd forgotten that you had a brother,' said Selden.

'Yes. But he ain't like me or dad. He's smaller, but awful quick and strong. He's got black hair, all curly, and gray eyes.' Sunny sighed. 'My hair ain't curly,' she added, seating herself on the porch.

'It's better than curly,' said Selden, smiling. 'It's wavy, and just about wonderful.'

Sunny tossed her head. 'Oh, that's what

you say *now*. But when you get to Newhall you'll forget all about that.'

'No,' said Selden gravely. 'I don't think I shall. If I knew as much about the woods and its folks as you do, I'd be quite proud of myself. I shall not forget.'

'But if you only had jest that much eddication and no more, and knew what could be known by schoolin', you wouldn't be proud. I reckon what seems wonderful to you up here is jest plain livin' for us. And I reckon what seems wonderful to me, like you knowin' all them stories and songs and books and figurin' railroads and sech, is jest plain livin' for you.' She pondered a moment, and then added: 'It's funny — folks allus wantin' other folkses' things.'

'For instance?'

Sunny hesitated. 'Well,' she said finally, and with considerable wistfulness, 'if I could jest know by heart that story — the one you talk and then sing, I'd make it last out my whole life. The one you was tellin' me when we was out on the river tonight.'

'Oh, "Aucassin and Nicolette"! Why, I didn't really think you half heard me. I

memorized it once. I'll see that you get a copy of it.'

'Oh, will you!' she exclaimed, and he knew her enthusiasm to be real and straight from her heart. Sunny's perfect frankness was one of her greatest charms.

'Dad's asleep,' she said finally, and Selden grinned outright. That assurance was audible.

'Your leg feelin' better?' she asked after a silence.

'Yes. That reminds me I must turn in, for I've got to get up early to-morrow morning. Your father has promised to take me up to Newhall in the canoe. I want you to know what a glorious time I've had here. I must thank you again for taking me on those canoe trips. You're an excellent hostess. Some day I'll try and return this hospitality.'

'That's nothin',' said Sunny, rising and standing in the doorway. 'Dad was wishin' we had more rooms so you wouldn't have to sleep in the little cabin ——'

'But you have made it as neat and as comfortable — don't ever think of that. I noticed that you repacked my pack-sack for me when you were cleaning out the cabin

the other morning. Thank you for that, too.'

Sunny flushed to the soft line of dusky hair shadowing her temples.

'Yes,' she murmured, gazing past him toward the edge of the forest. 'What does "eyes of vair" mean, Ward?'

'Oh, from "Aucassin and Nicolette"? Let me see. If I did know I've forgotten. I'm not sure, but I think it means "eyes of blue." However, my preference is for eyes of gray.'

'You would be likin' gray eyes mostly?' asked Sunny, with unusual pensiveness.

'Yes, especially with black hair and arched black eyebrows ——'

'Oh, Jiminy!' exclaimed Sunny, laughing. 'Even I could tell you mean me.' And she disappeared in the unlighted depths of the cabin.

Selden, somewhat taken aback, searched for his pipe. He had laid it on the beam running under the edge of the roof. As he fumbled in the darkness his fingers touched the sharp edges of a folded paper. Unthinkingly he drew it from the crevice.

Finding his pipe, he unconsciously slipped

the letter in his pocket that his hands might be free to fill his pipe and light it. Later he hobbled through the dew-heavy grass to his cabin. When he had lighted the small shelf lamp, he thought of the letter, and glanced at it, but did not read it. Then untying a parcel taken from his belongings, he unwrapped a small, narrow volume, the 'Aucassin and Nicolette' of his town days. With a pencil he wrote above his name on the flyleaf, 'Sunny Mateel, From ——' And he slipped the letter between the leaves of the book, thinking that perhaps it had been mislaid by Sunny or her father.

The kitchen door was open, but there was no light in the room when he came back to the Mateels' camp. He found the table, and placed the little book on it.

CHAPTER IX

ROUNDING up sturdily through the mist of the June morning came Jed Mateel to the river edge, where Selden, overanxious not to be late, awaited him on the rocky shore.

'Seen you was gone from your bunk,' said Mateel. 'I calc'lated you'd be waitin' here instid of settin' to a breakfast what's waitin' for you. Hot coffee don't do no hurt these cold mornin's. Keeps the river chill out till the sun gets to work. Jest chuck your pack under the canoe and come along up.'

'Thought I was late as it was, and I didn't want to bother you,' said Selden.

'What! And go without breakfast because you oversleept a leetle? If you stay up in these here woods long, boy, don't you never go to work without breakfast, even if ye have to wait till the follerin' mornin' to get it. 'Sides, Sunny would be feelin' worse than she be a'ready if she hears you run off without eatin'.'

'I'm sorry Sunny's not feeling well,' said Selden, placing his pack beneath the canoe and following Mateel up the trail.

'She ain't what you call sick,' grumbled the old man, striding along toward the cabin. 'She's jest actin' blue-like, 's'ef she'd heard suthin' like bad news.'

As they neared the cabin the old man paused and let Selden enter ahead of him. Then Mateel reached up to the niche where he had hidden the letter. It was gone.

'Didn't see nothin' of a letter layin' around on the porch, did you?' asked Mateel as he entered the doorway.

Selden nodded. 'I was looking for my pipe,' he explained, 'late last night, and I felt up under the beam and found the letter. I slipped it in the little book I left for Sunny. I didn't read the letter ——'

'Well,' said the old man, 'it jest had to be so, I reckon. And I reckon likewise Sunny'll remember that book and that letter all her life.'

Selden gathered from the old man's somewhat ambiguous utterances that the letter had had some heavy significance for the Mateels. However, he was innocent of it all, and the hot coffee had an inviting odor. The table was neatly laid for breakfast. Catching Selden's eye, the old man smiled wist-

fully. 'Sunny she said to tell you good-bye and to say thanks for the book. She's gone up to see her Aunt Lib Putter. They live quite a spell from here, so she started early.'

After breakfast Mateel leisurely lighted his pipe and sat on the porch step gazing toward the river. Selden, somewhat anxious to be away, finally asked if it were not a pretty long trail after they left the canoe to cross the delta to Newhall.

Mateel, turning the burned-out match in his fingers, puffed at his pipe and nodded. 'Yes, it do be some ways.'

Selden questioned him with his eyes.

'I never make no bones of Nelson's Falls,' continued Mateel. 'Most folks leaves the river there and walks across to Newhall. Me — and sometimes me and Sunny poles right up the rips. It saves about five hours — if you make it.'

'That means we'll get to Newhall to-night?'

Mateel nodded. 'Usually two days. But we'll make it in one. I was jest waitin' for the sun to come up good and strong. They's a bit of quick water right above here, and when it's foggy it's better left to itself. We'll go now.'

Then Selden realized what a woodsman could do toward making speed without hurrying. Mateel seemed to move with his usual great-limbed leisure, but the younger man had to trot to keep up with him. A turn of Mateel's wrist and the canoe lay right side up. An easy heave and it was launched. Selden stepped in, and Mateel followed. They shoved out into the river beneath the climbing mist robes of the morning. Before Selden could realize it they were far beyond the clearing of the camp. He turned to look back. A bend in the river intervened, and he set himself to paddling with a vim.

'About here,' said Mateel presently, 'you can put up that bow paddle.' And as Selden did so, the old man rose to his feet with the huge spruce setting pole in his hands. Selden sat watching the river pile down toward them between the rocks.

A heave of Mateel's broad shoulders and the little craft climbed a sliding wall of water that leveled to a stretch of spattering waves. At each thrust of the pole the canoe shot ahead smoothly despite pitch, cross-current, turn, or swirling pool. A deer came

to the river to drink. Selden watched until they were opposite it. Then to his amazement he heard a sharp *crack*, and turned to see Mateel, despite the swift current, boyishly striking the water with his pole and laughing as the buck bounded up, turned in the air, and plunged toward the shelter of the bushes. Then the woodsman caught the canoe as it drifted swinging in the current, and proceeded upstream as easily as before. Selden had seen poling, but nothing that paralleled the complete assurance of his companion in a more than difficult piece of quick water.

In the quiet reaches above the first rapids Selden took up his paddle and swung to the work. They journeyed silently and steadily up the forest-banked river. Noon found them, so Mateel said, more than halfway on their journey. By mid-afternoon they had entered the rapids known as Nelson's Falls, and were working slowly up the heavy rapids above. Selden, sitting quietly in the bow, studied the channel, noting the worst places and estimating the danger of running these rips in the opposite direction should he at any time return to Mateel's camp.

For an hour they had worked up the quick water when the old woodsman suddenly checked the boat and dropped back of a gigantic boulder in an eddy. Selden, glancing ahead, saw a canoe with a single occupant flashing toward them. Following it some two hundred yards came another canoe. Selden looked back at the old man, whose eyes were fixed on the nearer craft. The man in it, kneeling amidships, was paddling with all the lithe quickness and strength of the trained riverman. Dodging and turning, down the river he came, heading for the rock behind which Mateel's canoe waited. A dozen yards above the rock the man rose to his feet, braced himself, and drove his paddle through the foam of the rips. Selden could see that he was exerting all his strength.

Suddenly he heard Jed Mateel shout, 'The left side, Joe; take the left ——' But the other either did not hear or deliberately disregarded the well-meant warning. Down the right-hand channel he plunged, missed the rock by a finger's breadth, and flashed past, smiling. 'Get 'em!' he shouted, and Selden saw the gleam of white, even teeth,

and noticed that the man's hair was black and curled closely round a small, strongly poised head.

Almost instantly above the roar and lash of the rapids he heard the sharp *zing* of a bullet ricocheting from a rock. A puff of rock dust stung his face. Then came the blank, dead report of the rifle, muffled by the roar of the waters.

'Thunder!' he exclaimed as he spat the rock dust from his mouth. 'They're shooting at us!'

Mateel stood, bracing his weight against the setting pole to hold the canoe in the eddy. 'They can't get you there, behind that rock,' called Mateel.

'But they'll pot you ——'

As he spoke a second bullet flipped alongside the craft.

'They won't shoot again,' said Mateel. 'In jest about two seconds they'll be too pow'ful busy keepin' from bein' drownded.'

On dashed the second canoe, the bow man, now grasping his paddle, ready to fend off from the rock. Selden noticed the swarthy face and the wide cheek-bones of the half-breed. The man in the stern had risen to his

feet and was scanning the two channels. Too late he endeavored to swing the canoe to the left-hand side of the rock. He realized in a flash that the man ahead had won through the right-hand channel by sheer luck.

Down the pitch they plunged, struck the rock with a splintering crash, and Selden saw the gray bottom of the canoe flash past as it upset. Then, far below on the current, a head appeared, and then another. He watched the two men battered and swept from rock to rock until a bend in the river hid them from sight.

'Now I reckon there's room for us,' called Mateel, and dropping back a canoe length he forced the boat up past the rock and along the quieter water near the shore.

'Going back for them?' queried Selden, glancing over his shoulder.

'And them a-shootin' at us that-a-way? No, I reckon not. 'Sides, they'll come out in Bald Eddy, jest below, mebby some sick, but not drownded. That kind can't be drownded.'

'But, Mateel, why did you stand up and let them shoot at you? Why didn't you

"scrunch" down behind the rock? Why, great Scott, man ——' As Selden's head cleared of the confusion of events he began to realize that the old man's action had been deliberate.

'Why?' echoed Mateel. 'Why? Well, because the feller they was shootin' at — was — my boy — Joe.'

And Selden, conscious of the tragedy in the old man's voice, was silent. Bit by bit he recalled the story of the shooting of Tom Crogan, the dynamiting of the dam, the mention of Sunny's brother Joe, 'who had been in Canada for some time, as she said.

Then he thought of the letter that Mateel had asked about, and immediately he realized that it had something to do with Sunny's absence that morning at breakfast. Then the old man's admission: 'It was my boy Joe.'

'They don't fire at a man unless he's wanted pretty badly,' soliloquized Selden as he turned to his paddle. 'And the irony of it — my giving Sunny that letter which must have been from the son to the old man, and in that book, of all things!'

That night as he turned in in the little

spare room next to the clerk's above the Newhall store, and endeavored to sleep, the vision of an oncoming canoe, its occupant's bright face flushed with the wild joy of danger, seemed to recur incessantly. Following it came the chaos of the wreck as the second canoe struck the rock, and above it all the smiling face of Sunny Mateel. He rose and lighted the oil lamp at his elbow. On a chair lay his pack-sack. As he fumbled in it for tobacco he found a tiny package wrapped in coarse brown paper and tied with white string. 'Something new!' he exclaimed.

Slowly he untied the string, and from the brown paper envelope slipped a lock of raven-black hair tied with a soft, beautifully tanned thong of white doeskin. Holding the paper close to the light he read the scarcely legible scrawl: 'Charm against bullits. Sunny.'

'We don't believe in 'em, as a rule,' muttered Selden, and he grinned boyishly. 'But this is an exception — and — by cracky, so is she!'

CHAPTER X

The village of Newhall socially and architecturally crowded as close as it could to the eminence of the general store in which Ezra Newhall paid off his men and transacted his local business. Originally his office had been at the new mill, near the river, and close to the Great Heron Lake dam, but since the dynamiting of the dam he had removed to the store, which he owned. This was an advantage. It gave him the pulse of the village and incidentally an opportunity to keep an unobserved check on the clerk's transactions. Despite the credit system obtaining in the woods, clerks had been known to be carelessly liberal in dispensing merchandise and supplies to certain of their close friends. There was no such leakage of profits in Newhall's store.

The new village, a collection of rough, unpainted board shacks and a few more substantial log cabins, lay on an eminence at the western end of the great Newhall dam that controlled the waters of Great Heron

Lake. Round the village and crowding close to it, circled the untouched wilderness. Far to westward rose the dim line of hills marking the Canadian boundary, a great physical boundary that swung toward the north and east, where through a notch ran the brown sweep of the Nennassing River.

Ezra Newhall, gaunt, goat-bearded, keen-eyed, stood near the sluiceway of the dam, directing the closing of the third gate that would eventually lower the heavy tide of the Nennassing River to a shallow stream winding through a mud-encrusted river bed.

There had been difficulty in getting the drive of lumber through Pickerel Falls, a succession of rapid stretches a few miles below the southern end of the lake.

Newhall, in shutting off the natural flow of the lake toward Canada, knew that he would tie up the drive of the Saint John's Company, situated on the Nennassing a few miles across the border. Nevertheless he issued his orders peremptorily. *His* lumber threatened to be hung up. That was enough. The dynamiting of the Great Heron Dam the preceding spring — and it was tacitly

understood on both sides of the line that the Saint John's boys had done it — was reason enough for Newhall to shut off the flow of the Nennassing, to say nothing of the cherishing of his own immediate interests. The new dam had been erected at tremendous expense to the Newhall Company.

The matter was then under advisement by the Canadian and American Waterways and Forestry Commissioners, and gave promise of being 'under advisement' indefinitely.

Several years previous to the establishment of Newhall as a village, Ezra Newhall had grasped the possibilities of the marsh-edged, unfrequented Great Heron Lake, and had interested capital enough to build a dam at its northern end, shutting off the flow of its natural outlet and diverting the waters to a 'cut' at the southern end of the lake — a cut that connected with the so-called Great Heron River.

Ezra Newhall's interests, his mills, and Milltown City, lay to the south, eighty miles below on the Great Heron River, down which he drove his lumber each spring. To the north ran the Nennassing, past Saint John's and the Saint John's operations. The

spring flow of the Nennassing, controlled by Ezra Newhall, virtually held the Saint John's Company at his mercy. They had asked to have a representative at the Great Heron Dam that they might take advantage of a head of water either before Newhall began to drive or after his drive was in.

Fearing to establish the leverage of a precedent, Newhall refused them flatly. They offered a fair toll. This he also refused to accept. Then they appealed to their home Government, which in turn appealed to the United States Government. The matter was to be arbitrated — in the press. Unfortunately, the chairman of the arbitration committee held stock in the Newhall Company. His patriotism was shocked at the dynamiting of the dam. The new structure cut down dividends. The matter was under advisement. So far under, indeed, that the massy technicalities of international law threatened to bury it forever.

Unaware that the quiet, lounging figure he had seen in the store the night before was Newhall himself, Selden, arriving at the dam, looked round casually, noted with a keen eye the solidity of the structure, and finally

stepped up to the lean figure of the old lumberman.

'I'm looking for Mr. Newhall. They told me at the store that I'd find him down here somewhere.'

'Old Ezra Newhall?' queried the lumberman.

'Not necessarily,' replied Selden. 'I believe I said *Mr.* Newhall.'

'He was down here this mornin'. What you want to see him for? Mebby I could hunt him up for you.'

'Thanks. I'll hunt him up myself.'

'Huh! Some of you Canucks be mighty short-spoken and independent sometimes,' said Newhall, eyeing Selden sharply.

'Canucks?' said Selden in unaffected astonishment.

'Never mind that. I see you're a Yankee. Now what do you want? I'm Ezra Newhall myself.'

'Well,' said Selden easily, 'you've proved that I'm not a Canadian. Now if you'll prove that you are Mr. Newhall, I'll tell you what I want.'

The older man's eyes twinkled. 'You don't know nothin' about lumberin' — saw

that the first peek at you. You sized up that dam as if you knew buildin' pretty good. Gov'ment inspector, mebby?'

Selden smiled. 'No, I'm a civil engineer.'

'Not so turribly civil,' chuckled Newhall. 'What do you want to see *me* for?'

'Nothing, till I know to whom I'm talking.'

Newhall grinned, stroked his chin, and studied Selden for a few seconds. Then he shouted to one of the men on the dam: 'How much water, Tom?'

'Fourteen-six now, Mr. Newhall.'

'All right. Get No. 3 down. We need the water.'

'Yes, sir.' And the riverman returned to the gate.

Selden decided to be as brusque as his questioner. 'I want work,' he said simply.

'Nothing you can do round here,' said Newhall.

'All right,' said Selden cheerfully. 'I'll wait till something turns up.'

'Get fired from the new railroad?' asked Newhall.

'No, I quit,' said Selden quietly. But he flushed. nevertheless, not realizing that

Newhall's apparent rudeness was in reality his method of trying out a man.

'You don't say why you quit,' continued Newhall.

'I don't intend to,' replied Selden, smiling. 'But I'll say this much, I didn't have to, and I was asked to stay.'

'No need to get sassy,' said the old man, eyeing Selden shrewdly.

'I'm glad you've come to that conclusion. I think it was about time. Now if I had been your senior, I should have told you that some time ago.'

Ezra Newhall chuckled. He drew a jackknife from his overall pocket and clumsily pared the corner of a broken thumb nail. When he looked up again, Selden was standing, back toward him, watching the men on the dam. Newhall grinned appreciatively. 'You come up with Jed Mateel yesterday, I understand?'

Selden turned about. 'Yes.'

'Suppose Jed told you about the Canucks blowin' up the dam last year?'

'It was in all the papers,' replied Selden.

'Jed's a great talker when he gets goin.'

Selden was silent.

'Reckon Jed told you I offered him the job of tendin' gates nights?'

'Did you?' queried Selden.

'Didn't say so,' snapped Newhall. 'Said "I reckoned Jed told you I offered it to him."'

Out on the dam the gate tender seemed to be having trouble with the mechanism of Gate No. 3. A spurt of water showed beneath it. The spurt widened and spread to a bubbling pool. Newhall, instantly alert, shouted to the tender and ran along the footboard of the dam. Together he and the two gate tenders shouldered at the lever, but the gate would not drop back into place.

Selden, seizing a gunny sack, began filling it with gravel from the river-bank. He tied the mouth of the sack with a strip torn from his handkerchief and began filling another sack.

'Give us a hand!' shouted Newhall.

Selden shook his head, and beckoned to them. 'If you want to stop that leak,' he said, gesturing toward the dam, 'just get these sacks and dump them on the upper side of the gate. It's clogged with a sunken snag in the guides probably. The water will

force the bags through and carry off the snag or bank up the sacks against the leak. Either way will answer.'

'All right,' said Newhall. 'Here, give us a hand!'

Selden did not offer to help. 'I furnished the idea and you'll have to furnish the transportation,' he said casually, seating himself on the edge of the bank. 'It will work out all right.'

'Dummed cool,' muttered Newhall, tugging at one of the sacks.

Finally they lugged the sacked gravel to the dam and dropped it on the upper side of the gate. Selden watched the level below the dam with half-closed eyes. Suddenly a geyser of water spurted up, and he caught the glint of one of the sacks as it shot beneath the gate. 'Now!' he shouted, jumping to his feet. 'Open her up wide and then drop her down!'

The turmoil of waters ceased as the gate slid slowly into place.

Newhall, drawing a bandanna from his pocket, mopped his face. Shuffling along the footboard, he fronted Selden. 'Can you shoot?' he asked suddenly.

'Yes,'

'Heard about Tommy Crogan?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I got a job for a night watchman that don't drink and ain't easy to scare and can shoot — if he has to. It's fifty a month and board at the camp ——'

'Say seventy-five,' interrupted Selden. 'I'll need the extra twenty-five dollars to establish and maintain my plant.'

'Your plant?'

'Yes. Do I get the job?'

Newhall nodded.

'All right,' said Selden. 'Then I shall install a small electric-lighting system and string some reflectors and bulbs from one end of the dam to the other. There's enough waste water to run a dynamo. Then I can see what's going on nights.'

'You're the man for the place,' said Newhall. 'Come along up to the store and order what fixin's you want. Reckon it'll take two weeks to get 'em here. Hines at the store'll give you a rifle and cartridges.'

'All right, Mr. Newhall. And I want you to build a little shack at the eastern end of the dam. I'll bunk there. It will be cool at

night under those birches, and it is the highest spot on the bank. In the meantime I'll post a notice in the store to the effect that high-voltage wires will be installed about the dam. That news will reach Canada soon enough. There are mighty few men willing to risk running into a live wire — and men that would tackle 'most anything else for excitement, at that.'

CHAPTER XI

Early one July morning shortly after Selden had turned in to sleep, after a night's vigil, a messenger arrived at Newhall — a breed riverman who brought word from below that the drive was in and safely behind the booms at Milltown.

Ezra Newhall immediately routed out the clerk, and together they consulted the time-book. Finally Newhall left the store and proceeded toward the little shack where Selden slept. On his way there the old man, seeking within himself for an excuse to let Selden go, finally brought himself to face the fact that he had no good reason to discharge the young man other than a kind of intuition that Selden was too clever, too able, to be satisfied with his present occupation long. 'He knows as much about the whole system and the water-rights question as a lawyer, a'ready,' soliloquized Newhall. 'Now if he was to leave here mad, mebby — but, no. He said somethin' the other day about gettin' a vacation for a spell when

fall come. Don't know what he's plannin', but summer's dull and the pay-roll is long enough as it is. He can't get far on what money's comin' to him now. Besides, I can get a night watchman for half the money now that the drive's in.'

As Newhall stepped carefully along the running-board he noted with a grim, satisfied smile the system of wires and reflector lights that Selden had installed. 'He's a good one!' Newhall admitted to himself. 'But he knows too much.'

Selden, awakened, sat up in his bunk. 'Glad you came down,' he said sleepily. 'I wanted to ask you ——'

'For that vacation?' queried Newhall.

'No, about something else.'

'Well, if you don't mind bein' disturbed I'd like to have you explain the workin' of this here lightin' plant to me. I been a mite curious about it right along.'

'Why, certainly!' said the young man, slipping into his trousers. And he explained in detail the simple switchboard, the circuit, and the running of the dynamo. 'It's in first-rate shape. A boy could run it now,' he concluded.

'Uhuh. Well, what I was going to say was this: I reckon we don't need you any longer. The drive's in.'

'All right,' said Selden coolly. 'I thought you'd see I was worth more to you than this. I expected a promotion, but not so soon.'

'I'm thinkin' of puttin' in a cheaper man,' stated Newhall, flourishing his bandanna and blowing his nose vigorously.

Selden smiled, despite an inclination to do otherwise — and to the point. 'If I can't serve you in a higher capacity, I suppose that settles it, Mr. Newhall.'

'I'm sorry ——' Newhall began.

'Hold on! Don't get sorry for anything!' And at Selden's brusque exclamation Newhall blinked and coughed. 'You've found me capable and steady. Tacitly you promised me a position for some time to come. To be frank, you're the kind of liar that never goes on record — the worst kind, Mr. Newhall. I've also sized you up a bit, and I'll tell you just why you're letting me go. It is because you're afraid of me — of what I know. Do you get that?'

'See here!' began Newhall.

'If the Saint John's boys had wanted to,

they could have picked me off with a rifle a dozen times and then put the dam out of commission. I knew that. This is too near the border to be a healthy job. They didn't choose to try for it. That's why I'm here.'

'Of course — of course,' said Newhall, stuffing the bandanna in his hip pocket. 'But I don't calc'late there's any one goin' to come close enough at night while them lights are goin'.'

'They wouldn't have to,' said Selden briskly. 'One man could go up the lake a few hundred yards and drop a float in the rift where the draw begins. He could pay out a few hundred hards of fuse, and, ten to nothing, blow the gates clear over the Nennassing Mountains, and twenty watchmen couldn't stop him.'

'Them Canucks ain't got brains enough to think of that,' said Newhall, with a surface assurance that he did not feel. 'But they must be some way of guardin' against that, too.'

'There is,' said Selden indifferently.

'What is it?'

Selden laughed. 'I couldn't quite bring myself to give you that information — now.

But I'll illustrate for you. For some reason or other the prime mover in the last escapade of the Saint John's boys has a reason to feel friendly toward me. I was told so by a person whom I cannot doubt. However, I was also told that if I should give up my place here, or should happen to be away for a night or two, things might happen. Of course, I took some of that with a grain of salt, but in the main I believe it's true.'

'You can't swing no bluff like that on me, young feller.'

'Very well, Mr. Newhall. But I did think you were a better judge of men. You have trusted me in letting me care for your property. Now you don't trust me when I tell you something that I'm positive is so.'

'Where do you calc'late to go from here?' asked the lumberman.

'Pertinent, that, now you're no longer my respected employer. Well, I'm going down-river to Saint John's. I'm going to stay up North in the brush. I like this country. It's big, and there are some big doings on the horizon.'

'I suppose, after studyin' the situation, you figure to do some mighty tall engineerin'

and like as not give the Saint John's people a head of water 'most any time they want it by changin' the channel of the Nennassing and leavin' Newhall high and dry and Great Heron Lake a frog pond, or somethin' like that?'

'That wouldn't be impossible,' replied Selden.

'See here, Selden, I ain't goin' to stand no insinuations or threats from nobody. If you got any idea of tryin' to get even with me ——'

'Even — mush! I'm not that kind, and you know it. Just one thing more before I draw my pay and go; I'll wager my reputation against that horsehair watch-chain of yours that within forty-eight hours you'll wish you had kept me at any price.'

CHAPTER XII

About ten o'clock that morning, Selden, garbed in a new outfit of flannel shirt, khaki trousers, and moccasins, stood looking at the tumbling tide of Nelson's Falls. He had come down the river trail, headed for Mateel's camp. He shifted the pack-sack from his shoulders, and, sitting on a log, filled his pipe and smoked.

'Hope that forty-eight-hour scare I gave Newhall does not materialize,' he muttered grinning. 'He'd almost be able to make out a case against me as an accomplice if anything did happen. I wonder just how much influence Joe Mateel has with the Saint John's boys and if Sunny is really holding them off until I'm out of their way. Doesn't seem probable, but one can't tell up here. She surely wouldn't have written that letter about it, if she hadn't had a reason for doing so. She's not the kind to scare up situations.'

Selden had but a few dollars left of his July wage, and he decided to walk to Mateel's and hire the old man to paddle him

down-river to Saint John's. Of course he had his home bank account to fall back on, but he wisely realized that folk who begin falling back on reserve funds usually keep on falling until they reach the bottom. He had a certain pride in making good at his new venture of free lance, and he was one who criticized himself fairly.

The noon sun and the low *boom* of the rapids lulled him to daydreams. He awoke suddenly as a shadow fell across the shingle at his feet. Beside him stood a squat, swarthy-hued breed.

'Hello!' exclaimed Selden, standing up. 'Where did you drop from?'

'Bo' jou'! Bo' jou'!' grunted the breed. 'Ah mek to go to dat Mo'sieu' Mateel hees place.'

'Good! Will you take a passenger?'

The other's keen black eyes swept him from head to foot. 'You wan' make traverse to Mo'sieu' Mateel hees cabane?'

Selden nodded, wondering where he had seen that keen-eyed, wide-cheeked face before. Perhaps among the Newhall habitants — he was not sure.

'Ah'm goin' run dees rivaire down to Ma-

teel hees camp. Mabbe you laik to come weet moi in de canoe?'

'Don't mind if I do,' replied Selden.

'Den Ah get dat canoe.' And the breed paced up the shore several yards and drew a canoe from the bushes.

Selden, somewhat astonished at this, pondered. 'Wonder how he came to make such a good connection with my plan? That canoe is wet. He must have run down behind me and then run the boat ashore and come down here on foot to find out who I was. Seems queer.'

As Selden embarked, he noticed that the bow of the craft had been badly smashed, and recently, as the newness of the repair showed. 'Had a bad smash-up,' he said, kneeling and taking up the bow paddle.

'Oui. But Ah feex heem all right. Heem jus' strong laik de firs' taime.'

Again Selden pondered. 'Now it's natural to say where and how an accident occurred first and explain the details afterward. This chap is cautious. Wonder what he's up to?'

Whatever that might be, Selden soon ceased to speculate about, becoming com-

pletely absorbed in the excitement of running the rapids. When they neared the big rock in midstream, from behind which he and Mateel had witnessed the perilous passage of one canoe and the instant wreck of another, the breed rose to his feet and scanned the roaring current. From above there was no way of judging which channel was the practicable one until almost upon the rock, but Selden felt the canoe sagging toward the left quite a distance above the hazard. They ran the pitch quickly and easily, but the engineer's scalp grew tight nevertheless as the big rock flashed past.

A few minutes of dropping from level to level, dodging, sliding, checking, and even swinging clear round and drifting through an opening stern first — but always with the assurance of mastery — and they were out upon the lazy current of the river, gliding smoothly along beneath the strokes of two vigorous paddles.

Selden was hardly prepared to see the rapids just above Jed Mateel's camp so soon. He had not realized that downstream travel often shortens a journey by half. As they

passed the last pitch, he looked ahead for the smoke of the camp on the hillside.

'Guess that's Mateel's,' he said, glancing back at the breed.

'Oui. Dat ess Mateel hees place.'

'What in thunder are you buckling on that gun for?' asked Selden as the breed laid his paddle across his knees and strapped on a holster.

'Ah'm jus' deputy shereef dees taime. Don' you make for to mak' signe. Eef you do, den Ah shoot —— '

'Oh, you go to blazes!' said Selden. 'You wouldn't dare pull a gun on me even if you wanted to.'

'Ah swear you een for to help arres' dat Joe Mateel ——' began the breed.

'Well, you'll have to swear a little louder then, Mr. Man. You tricked me into this, and now you want me to act as a fancy piece of armor plate for you. Afraid to do your own work?'

'Non. Ah no 'fraid of hany mans.'

'That so? Well, I suppose here's where I get out and let you sneak up behind me to the cabin — is that it?'

'Oui.'

'Suppose the Mateels let fly and get me — what about that?'

'Dey don't do dat. Dey know you.'

'Well, "you have the drop." I believe that's the proper thing to say.' And Selden stepped from the canoe, with the breed following. The latter held the Colt with its muzzle centered in the small of Selden's back.

As they approached the slope toward the cabin, Selden made a plan. He knew that the Mateels would probably be on the alert, especially if Joe Mateel was harbored in the place. The breed had tricked him into an uncomfortable position. He would endeavor to return the courtesy. And, despite the thought that possibly Joe Mateel was guilty of the shooting of Crogan, Selden's sympathies were all with Mateel. If Joe escaped, that was a side issue just then.

Within a few paces of the cabin the deputy told him to halt. At that moment he heard Sunny singing, in quaint colloquial verse, a line from 'Aucassin and Nicolette.' That decided him. He slipped his hand up to his shirt collar and unbuttoned the two top buttons. 'It's hot!' he exclaimed, as if ex-

plaining the action. The breed, standing behind him, could not see the polished brown of the shoulder holster beneath Selden's shirt, nor the glint of the square-stocked little automatic pistol. Just then Sunny, on some errand or other, came to the door. 'Oh, Ward!' she exclaimed, and then hesitated as she saw the breed.

'How are you, Sunny? It's mighty hot, isn't it? May we have a drink of water?'

'Sure!' And, smiling, she brought the dipper. As she came close to Selden, he leaned forward slightly and glanced down at his left shoulder. She stood with the dipper in her hand, puzzled. But as she saw the butt of the little automatic, her quick mind awoke to the situation. Selden took the dipper and raised it to his lips. He tilted his head, and, as he did so, he felt a slight tug at his shirt front. Then he threw the dipper of water over his shoulder and squarely in the breed's face.

Sunny, her smile gone and her gray eyes blazing, stood with the muzzle of the automatic pressed against the deputy's ribs.

'Here, give me your gun while you take a drink,' said Selden. 'I ought to have called

your bluff down at the river. But it's nine to one you had better do as Miss Mateel says, now. If she empties that gun into your system, you'll simply fall to pieces.'

The deputy handed his revolver to Sunny. 'You, Grégoire!' she said reproachfully. 'You, Grégoire!'

'I didn't know you were acquainted with the party of the second part,' said Selden, wiping his forehead. 'Well, I'm glad that's over. I was expecting something to happen.'

'Ward!' whispered the girl. 'Ward! Joe's asleep in the back room. Go in and tell him about this — but, oh, don't let him come out here. Send him away — quick! Tell him there's some one coming up from the river ——'

Selden stepped into the cool shade of the cabin. 'Here's where I take another little chance. Waking a hunted man isn't apt to be healthy — to the wakeist.'

But Jed Mateel, coming from the woods, solved the problem. He brushed past the breed without even nodding, entered the cabin, and, shouldering Selden aside, shook his son to wakefulness. Selden returned to Sunny. Presently he heard a whistle, long

and shrill, and then two sharp answering notes.

'He can go now,' said Sunny, lowering the pistol.

'Hold on!' exclaimed Selden. 'Don't let him have that gun of his yet!'

'The best rifle but one in these woods is kiverin' him right now,' said the girl. 'Joe is gone — and he won't dast to follow.'

Bareheaded, she stood facing the dark-visaged breed. The sun glowed lustrously on her rippling black hair. Her gray eyes were blurred with tears. 'Go, Grégoire!' she said, and her voice trembled. 'I know you was only doin' your duty as you seen it. So was I.'

Noting Selden's quizzical expression, she smiled wistfully. 'Grégoire la Croix, it was. He asked me to marry him once. It was at a dance. He had been drinkin' liquor. Joe and him was friends afore that. Joe, my brother, like to 'most killed Grégoire that night. Grégoire is really half Indian — and he'd like to get even with Joe and me.'

CHAPTER XIII

THERE were six canoes in all. For three days the twelve Saint John's boys had poled up the shallow, turbulent, rock-strewn channel of the Nennassing, camping at night on the high, wooded banks until they were within a few hours' journey of Newhall Settlement. On the fourth day they remained in camp, philosophically awaiting nightfall. Their canoes, drawn up the steep, raw mud banks of the half-empty stream, lay overturned here and there in the seclusion of some dwarfed cedars. Several of the men slept, stretched beneath their canoes.

Pierre du Lac, the huge, ruddy-haired, iron-limbed leader of the expedition, reclined with half-closed eyes beneath the shade of a bush. He smoked indolently, turning his head from time to time to glance toward the depths of the forest.

Near him squatted Jules la Rue, a little, bow-legged Frenchman, grizzled and keen-eyed. From the edge of Jules's high-topped moccasin peeped the bone handle of a skin-

ning knife. As Jules shifted his position, the polished handle of the knife shone in the sun.

Big Pierre smiled somewhat scornfully. *He* was unarmed, save with herculean muscles and the careless bravery of youth. Old Jules la Rue spat in the ashes of the fire and grunted. Each understood the other's silent comment. Each appreciated the other's special prowess.

Opposite the two sat a long-limbed, black-haired half-breed, carefully shaping a setting pole with a crooked knife. He was Césaire Garneau, nicknamed 'The Lou'-Garou.' He smiled as he witnessed the silent interchange of comment between his companions, and his smile was crooked and scornful. He was unarmed save for a superhuman skill with paddle and setting pole. His forte was speed of retreat in perilous waters by day or night. He was rivaled as a canoeman only by 'Wild Joe Mateel,' Jed Mateel's outlawed son.

Nine of the twelve Saint John's boys slept while three kept watch. Pierre du Lac with huge indolence, Jules la Rue with open alertness, and the Lou'-Garou with the slit-eyed craftiness of the wolf. Nominally they were the three leaders of the expedition. Not a

man of them carried rifle or six-gun, and not a man of them but would have faced either without a shadow of fear. They were picked men. Alec McLean, the Scotch superintendent of the Saint John's Company, had 'retained their services' through the summer months, paying them a considerable wage in advance. One by one he had summoned them and tersely explained that they would not be needed around camp, but if they contemplated a fishing trip, south, for instance, the wangan would outfit them with canoes, blankets, and provisions. There would be no need for rifles, he explained, nor, in fact, for rods and lines. The water was so low that the trout were about gone from Nennassing, he told them.

At this, Pierre du Lac had smiled; so had Jules la Rue and Césaire Garneau. The others had listened and acquiesced stoically.

McLean had a further conference with the three who had smiled. Not a word was spoken about Newhall, yet three days after the conference, six canoes lay side by side in the dead water level of the Nennassing River, opposite Saint John's, and in them sat twelve as rugged and fearless rivermen

as the North Country ever mothered. The canoes were all headed upstream. That had been three days ago.

"Ah t'ink mabbe day poliss he get Joe Mateel mabbe dees taime,' said Jules, nodding to Big Pierre.

'Ah don' t'ink dat dey fin' heem,' growled the huge ruddy-haired Frenchman.

The Lou'-Garou glanced at them, but said nothing.

'W'en we mak' traverse fraum dees place?' queried Jules presently.

Pierre pointed to the western horizon. Jules nodded. Each knew that the other wished to formulate some plan of attack on Newhall. None of them would offer a direct suggestion.

Presently Garneau, 'the Wolf,' rose, and, going to his canoe, returned with a package which he opened showly. Before each of his companions he laid a small coil of black, wiry fuse and several sticks of dynamite. They said nothing. Again he went to the canoe, and returned with a wicker-covered jug. 'Petrol,' he whispered, and hid the jug in the bushes.

His companions nodded, and glanced at each other.

Then Jules, old, bent, grizzled, jerked his thumb toward the sleeping men. 'Ah t'ink, den, dat you go firs' to dat post offeece, and den dey come een laik dey don' know dat hany mans of Saint John's ees dere. Firs' one, den one, den one, laik dat; hein?'

Big Pierre nodded gravely. 'Ah mak' de beeg fight laik hell. Den you mak' traverse to dat dam — an' mak' flambeau?'

Jules and the Lou'-Garou grinned. 'Oui,' they replied softly.

'Den Ah mak' to sleep,' said Big Pierre. And, arising, he strode briskly to his canoe.

'Ah t'ink Ah go for sleep,' echoed Jules, and he, too, found his blankets and stretched himself in the shade.

But the Lou'-Garou still sat, his eyes narrowed, slowly shaping the setting pole. His head was turned sideways, and he seemed to be pondering. Suddenly he straightened up, brushed the shavings from his clothes, and crept beneath his canoe. He had planned the retreat that had been puzzling him all that long afternoon. Whatever the outcome of the reprisal might be, with him lay the responsibility of a quick and successful return to Canadian territory

— with his men. He would lead, and the others would follow. That was tacitly understood. No one had spoken of it, yet he would not sleep until he was reasonably certain of a feasible plan. He would wait until the gates had been blown from the dam. Wait until the river had risen to somewhere near its normal height, and then run to Canada on the liberated waters, and none knew the natural channel of the stream better than he.

The afternoon sun drifted imperceptibly toward the western treetops. The curled white shavings from the setting pole cast long, writhing shadows on the grass as the afternoon breeze moved them. Two or three of the men awoke and stretched. One arose, and, taking a tin cup, started for a spring a few rods distant. He returned to camp hurriedly and without drinking. He awoke the Lou'.

'Ah jus' see dat Grégoire la Croix!' he whispered.

'W'ere you see heem?' queried the Wolf.

The other pointed toward the forest.

'And den you come back to dees rendezvous?' questioned the Wolf, with blunt sarcasm.

The riverman nodded.

'You wan beeg fool, Ah t'ink. But Ah feex heem, jus' same.'

He touched Jules, who awoke, grumbling. They whispered together, and then quietly awoke the rest of the men. Not long afterward, the bushes parted, and La Croix, breathing heavily, came to the center of the group and greeted most of the men by name. They replied pleasantly, but La Croix noticed that they glanced frequently from him to Jules and Big Pierre. Feeling that he was unwelcome, La Croix determined to play boldly, and to that end he squatted near Jules, and, taking out his pipe, asked for tobacco.

'Why you don' come back to Saint John dat las' taime ——' And Jules nodded toward Newhall. La Croix knew well enough that he referred to the dynamiting of the dam.

'Ah mak' to run fraum dat place — an' hide,' he replied, grinning.

Suddenly Jules's arm shot out, and La Croix found himself flat on his back. Jules pushed back the deputy's coat, exposing the little silver badge of his office.

Not a word was spoken. Then tense silence struck chill to the half-breed's heart. He knew his men, or most of them. He realized, now, that they knew in a way that he had turned traitor in becoming an employee of the law, and an employee of American law. He was in the service of the police. That was bad enough. He had stumbled upon their camp, and knew their plan. That he had done so unintentionally they would not believe. But they did not know of his latest treachery, the attempt to arrest Joe Mateel.

He glared round at his erstwhile comrades, who drew back quietly, leaving him in the hands of the Wolf and one other.

'You mak' to arres' Joe Mateel, Ah t'ink,' asserted Big Pierre, and La Croix knew then that, while Pierre was not sure of this, he suspected treachery in that quarter.

He drew himself up, and, glancing at Big Pierre, replied boldly: 'Joe Mateel he mah fren'. Ah don' mak' to com' een dees camp.'

'You don' mak' to go hout,' laughed Pierre.

'That's right,' said a quiet voice, and the men, ringed about La Croix, started. Then

Joe Mateel stepped from the shadow of the cedars and strode toward the group. He leaned his rifle in the crotch of a tree. La Croix's face went gray.

'Trailed him all the way down here,' said Mateel, pushing back his hat and squatting easily. 'He thought I was ahead of him. Might know me better than that. Tried to get me up home. Sunny just poked a gat in his ribs, and he changed his mind. He's got a gun on him somewhere, but you needn't worry. He can't shoot quick enough to find it out the same day.'

Mateel spoke rapidly and with the ease of one secure in his own ability. Several of the men stared at him, open-mouthed. They had anticipated his appearance — should he ever appear to them again — as a hunted man. Joe Mateel hardly noticed them.

'Well,' he said, casting a level glance at La Croix, 'I know what the boys are here for. I'm sorry I can't be with them on this thing. They know why I can't take the risk. But you ——' He turned toward the group. 'Hadn't we better settle *this*, before it makes trouble?'

Several of the men nodded. Big Pierre

glanced toward the setting sun. Césaire Garneau, the lean Wolf, frowned thoughtfully. 'Oui,' he said presently. 'Ah t'ink dat eet ees bon dat he fall hout de canoe an' get drown' dees nuit.'

The deputy, face to face with Mateel, seemed to lose his known and ordinary courage. 'You don' keel moi laik dat?' he said, addressing Joe Mateel.

'No, nor shoot you in the dark,' replied Mateel. 'I don't care what the boys do with you. But if you *do* slip through them, I'll finish the job, as sure as you shot Tommy Crogan.'

To La Croix's vehement denial of Joe Mateel's charge, the latter paid little attention, but turned away and talked with the Lou'-Garou.

La Croix, with hands bound behind him, stood watching the play of the sunset across the treetops. As twilight gathered, he shivered a little, although the air was warm. Down below he could hear the purr of the black waters. A star grew keen-edged in the west. Around him the group of Frenchmen — his old comrades — conversed in whispers. He wished that they would build a

fire that he might see their faces, but he knew they would not. He overheard Jules tell Mateel suggestively that after the gates were once opened full on the Newhall dam, should a man stumble and fall from the running-board, he would not come out of the undertow alive. Again La Croix shivered. Presently a figure stood before him in the dusk. It was Joe Mateel. His hat was off, and his forehead seemed strangely white beneath his tumbled black hair. Tommy Crogan had been shot in the forehead at dusk.

'I expect you're going to get put out in the shuffle,' said Mateel. 'I'm elected to help you off. The boys think I ought to, as things stand between you and me. You've got one chance — for I hate to put a man out that hasn't got a chance to fight back. If you accept this chance, it means that you take your canoe and light out for the line, and keep on going until you get lost north of the big hills. You know that country and the Injuns up there. For my own sake I hadn't ought to give you *that* chance, but the boys don't like my idea of handing you over to the law.' Mateel advanced a pace, and, roundabout, La Croix heard the rustle of

moccasins in the grass as the group drew nearer.

'Who shot Tommy Crogan the night the dam was blown up?' Mateel's voice was low and tense.

Several of the group muttered in astonishment. 'Why ask such a question?' they reasoned. 'Every one knew that Mateel shot the watchman.' La Croix was sullenly silent.

'Come, hurry up!' said Mateel. 'We've got other business. It's your chance.'

'Den you let me go — now — eef Ah say?' asked La Croix.

'Yes,' said Mateel. And 'Oui,' breathed the Frenchmen.

'*Ah* shoot heem,' muttered La Croix.

'Louder, Grégoire!' said Mateel, with strange gentleness. 'I want all the boys to hear it.'

'*Ah* shoot Tommee Crogan,' repeated La Croix, 'aftaire he shoot fife taimes by me.'

'Yes, and you emptied the magazine of my rifle to do it,' said Mateel. 'Do you suppose I'd needed more than one shot? That ought to been evidence enough that I wasn't a-handlin' the rifle. Then you threw the gun away in the bushes and dug out. When they

found the gun, it was up to me, eh? Thought you had Joe Mateel for trimming you that time you were drunk and tried to insult Sunny, eh? I'd like to go at you with my hands — now — but you're whipped. You heard what they said. If this river scrap wasn't a fight for our grub and our right to live, I'd hand you over to the sheriff now. But our business is bigger — worth more — than you, dead or alive. Get out of my sight — and don't ever get between daylight and my rifle again!'

CHAPTER XIV

Dusk was gathering round the cabins of Newhall Settlement when Big Pierre du Lac shouldered his way through a group of idlers and entered the store. Ezra Newhall glanced up from the bundle of receipts he was checking. The Frenchman smiled, leaning against the counter. 'Tobac'," he said, flinging a coin on the counter.

The clerk gave him a cut of chewing tobacco, and was about to change the coin. Then he stepped to Newhall and whispered.

'Canady money, eh?' said Newhall. Then, to Pierre: 'Canady money don't go here any more, my friend.'

The big Frenchman smiled innocently. 'Oui?' he said pleasantly. 'Ah don' t'ink Ah'm your fren', but dat monee, she good monee.'

'But it don't *go* here!' exclaimed Newhall. 'We don't take it.'

'Dat ees bon! T'ank — merci — for dat tobac',' and the Frenchman pocketed the plug of tobacco and lounged across the store.

Two or three *habitants*, seemingly attracted by the argument, drifted in through the doorway. The clerk, shrewdly enough, knew that they were Saint John's men, but Newhall, intent on the unpaid-for tobacco, failed to grasp any significance in the appearance of the down-river boys.

'Hah!' exclaimed Big Pierre, striding toward one of the *habitants*. 'Ah hask mah fren' eef Canada monee she no good.'

Newhall started as Jules la Rue, silent, sinister, quick-eyed, entered the store. Unlike Big Pierre, *he* had not shouldered his way in, but had cleared a path with his glance.

'You got good monee?' asked Pierre, gesturing toward Newhall. 'He say dat mah monee no good — Canada monee no good. Ah wan' tobac' ——'

'Who say dat?' snarled Jules, sweeping a glance round the store. He noticed two or three of his friends had followed him in quietly.

'Ah t'ink Le Canadaw ees de bon plac' ——' began Pierre, but he was interrupted by the appearance of the Lou'-Garou, tall, lean, long-haired. The Wolf stepped inside

and affected a slow surprise at seeing the other Frenchmen. They exchanged a perfunctory greeting, and Pierre explained to him, as to a stranger, his pretended predicament.

'Hah!' grunted the Lou'-Garou, drawing a plug of tobacco from his pocket. 'Dees ees le bon tobac' hof Saint John, mah fren'.'

Ezra Newhall stepped to the recently installed local telephone, connecting Newhall Settlement with Milltown. Pierre and Jules exchanged glances. Pierre nodded. He had counted the Frenchmen present. His nine followers — not including Garneau and La Rue — were there. Presently La Rue and the Newhall men, many of whom had drifted in, separated to let them pass. The place was tense with expectancy.

When they were gone, some one whispered: 'The Saint John's boys!' And a red-haired lumberman of Newhall swore roundly. All eyes were focused on Big Pierre, who leaned easily against the counter, a little nearer to the hanging oil lamp than he had been originally. So he stood for perhaps a minute. He saw one of his companions lift a heavy boot from one of the racks above his

head. 'Here! What you doin' with that boot?' said the clerk. His answer came instantly. The boot was hurled at the light above the post-office pigeonholes. With a crash the lamp fell to the floor.

'Hoop!' cried Big Pierre. 'Ah wan' room for to mak' de beeg fight!'— and, clearing a circle with his huge arms, he sprang forward, jumped in the air, and turned with a kick. The hanging lamp dropped with a crash and spatter of glass.

'Dees way!' called Pierre, and his nine companions, some of whom had mingled, unnoticed, with the last of the crowd, plunged through the smoking darkness toward him. They drew together at the upper end of the store, and, seizing the long bench in front of the counter, ripped it from the floor and massed behind it. Using it as a battering-ram, they rushed toward the doorway. It was closed and locked. Grunting, kicking, and the thudding of blows punctuated the darkness. Some one yelled for a light. The Frenchmen laughed.

'Heyeh! *Hoop!*' shouted Pierre, and, gathering headway, the dauntless nine swept down the aisle between the counters, carry-

ing a stray chair, boxes, and a sweating, cursing tangle of humanity before them. The door was locked. That was of little moment. Door, rickety frame, and half the front of the store fell with a crash into the street, and on top of it came a plunging chaos of arms and legs. Ezra Newhall's rifle was as useless as a nursing-bottle would have been.

Out in the twilight the Frenchmen were distinguishable by their individual bulk and their long *voyageur's* sashes. The Newhall boys rallied and drove the little band of Saint John's warriors toward the woods.

Swinging the broken bench above him like a flail, Big Pierre felled man after man as he retreated with his comrades. Close to the edge of the forest he called to his fellows. Suddenly he flung the splintered bench-top at his pursuers, and, gaining pause, cried mockingly: 'You cry laik gran' bébé for mak' light. Mabbe you haf' light now, hein?'

Several of the Newhall men turned as he pointed toward the river. Along the dam ran a path of bluish flame, and the roof of the mill was swathed in a tide of running fire. Pierre and his companions leaped to the

woods, scattering like quail. They would assemble again at the canoes.

A quarter of a mile below the dam, the six canoes lay hidden in the brush. Presently a figure crept through the dusk and crouched near them. Then came another and another.

'La Rue?' whispered the first figure.

'Oui, Pierre. 'Ow you mak' heem?'

'Bon!' growled the big Frenchman, winding his handkerchief round a torn wrist. 'W'ere ees da Lou'-Garou?'

'Ah don' know. Ah see heem aftaire he make flambeau hon de dam. Den he go.'

More Frenchmen drifted in and squatted beside the canoes.

'Ve go fin' heem?'

'Ve vait,' said La Rue, peering through the shadows.

From their concealment, they could see the twinkling lights of the dam, each intense in its cuplike reflector. The petrol that the Wolf had used had burned out. The timbers of the dam were too heavy to take fire immediately.

'Den Ah t'ink dat Lou' he go for to mak' ——' and the big Frenchman threw both

hands upward expressively. La Rue nodded.

Even as they watched there came a faint, blunt report, and one of the lights was blotted out. Again came the far sound of a rifle-shot, and another light was gone. Still again the rifle sounded, and another light popped out, leaving a blank in the chain of illumination. La Rue, saturnine, silent, smiled grimly. Pierre laughed like a boy. 'Joe Mateel,' he said, and La Rue grunted an affirmative.

Up-river the enraged crew charged down on the burning mill to find no one there. They turned toward the dam. As they stood, stunned and dismayed, the rifle cracked from across-river, and another electric light was blotted out.

Ezra Newhall, rushing out on the footboard of the structure, examined the gates. They were intact. Beneath him a bullet whizzed and thumped into a timber, and the air was filled with particles of flying glass as still another light went out. The Newhall men began to realize that the Saint John's boys had much the better of it. Some of the lumbermen turned and tried ineffectually to 'sand' the blazing mill, but the flames were

too strong for them. The light of the conflagration spread across the river and illumined the dam, magnifying each hewn timber and glistening on spike and bolt.

'What's he shootin' them lights out fer?' queried a lumberman.

''Spect he's waitin' till the fire in the mill dies out,' replied a voice. 'Then the dam'll be dark, and a man could step out and monkey with the gates, mebby.'

'Why didn't they do that first?' questioned the man.

'The Frenchers likes to show off. That's where they gits their fun out of this,' replied the other.

Jimmy Caine, the new watchman, asked Newhall's permission to shoot any man that attempted to step out on the dam from the other shore.

'No,' said Newhall. 'Might be one of our boys. You wait.'

'Wait for what?' queried Jimmy Caine.

Newhall did not answer. The shadowy figure, seemingly creeping along the edge of the far shore, absorbed his attention. The light from the burning mill waned and flickered. The lights on the dam had all been

extinguished. The wires had been cut by a bullet from the rifle across the river in the brush.

Newhall continued to gaze at the shadow that crept toward the footboard. Was it a shadow?

Presently in the darkness a small spot of red fire glowed like the end of a lighted cigar. Above the spot of fire was the Lou'-Garou, coolly igniting the fuses that led to the sunken dynamite beneath the three gates. Again the spot of fire glowed. This time nearer to the crowd on the river-bank.

'Here! Gimme that rifle!' cried Newhall looking round for the watchman.

Caine handed the gun to him. He drew it up, when his arm was grasped, and a voice, gasping with fatigue of hard travel, said chokingly:

'No! No — more — of this. Don't shoot, Newhall! I tried to get — here — sooner — and stop — it. But don't — be a fool and — murder — some one.' And Ward Selden, white and reeling, struggled with Newhall for possession of the gun.

Coolly the Lou'-Garou stepped to the far shore, trotted down the river trail, and hal-

looed to his companions across the river. 'Ah feex heem,' was his only reply to a dozen questions.

Several of the Frenchmen turned their canoes over and were about to launch them after the Lou' had joined the group, but he stopped them. From up-river came the dull, trembling thump of dynamite exploded under water. With a roar and a rush, the liberated waters of Great Heron Lake spread to the wide reaches of the dry river bed. The Wolf had perfected his retreat. The Newhall rivermen, should they attempt to follow the Saint John's crew, could not launch a canoe immediately below the dam in the tidelike turbulence of the suddenly liberated waters. By the time the river had spread to somewhere near its normal level, the Frenchmen would be on their way down-stream, running the quick, easy current of the old channel. Daylight would find them well across the Canadian line.

That the Frenchmen had not more completely destroyed the Great Heron Dam was somewhat of a puzzle to Newhall. They had but dropped three light charges against the gates. The main structure was still intact.

'There's somebody with brains behind this raid,' he said, addressing a crowd of his men that night. 'The Frenchers, left alone, would have blowed up the whole thing.'

Selden, stepping forward, was about to speak, when Newhall, realizing his presence more thoroughly since the scuffle for the gun, and remembering the young man's remark about 'keeping him at any price,' leveled a lean forefinger at the other's face. 'I jest said some one with brains was behind this raid — and I guess you're it!'

The crowd, expectant and eager for fresh excitement, surged round Selden. Angered at their attitude, he struck out, fighting his way toward Newhall. 'What do you think I am? What do you think I came back for? Would I do that if I'd been in it?' he cried.

Two lumbermen crushed his arms to his sides.

'We're pretty nigh sure what you are now,' said Newhall venomously. 'And we're goin' to put you where you can rest up a few years — and think it over.'

CHAPTER XV

According to his agreement with Selden, Joe Mateel had waited for him at the little temporary camp above Newhall, where, the evening before, the young engineer had left the old man, promising to return no later than noon next day. From that camp they were to have dropped down the Nennassing to Saint John's.

Jed Mateel had refused to go to Newhall, maintaining that he could not appear there so recently after his son had left home under the urgency of the deputy's visit. So Selden had set out alone, walking — or, more properly, running — across the delta from the Great Heron to the Nennassing at Newhall, arriving at an unfortunate hour and much later than he had anticipated.

Mateel waited until noon the following day. Then, with ponderous deliberation, he launched his canoe and returned to his cabin. Sunny met him at the riverside. 'Thought you was goin' to Saint John's?' she said.

Mateel stepped heavily from the boat.

'He didn't come back,' he replied. 'I ain't been near to Newhall sence Joe's been — sence Joe's — gone away.'

'Didn't come back!' exclaimed Sunny.

Mateel nodded wearily. 'Seems everything is goin' wrong. I didn't figure young Selden 'ud get mixed up in it; how come it?'

'Mebby he got hurt,' said Sunny. 'Mebby he got hurt in the raid ——'

'What raid you talkin' about?' asked her father quickly.

'Why, the Saint John's boys ——'

'So *you* knowed it — and tole him, eh?'

Sunny nodded. 'Yes. But you knowed it — and didn't tell me, likewise, dad.'

'That's diffrunt. I wondered how he come to know it. He tole me somethin' that made me suspicion they was that in his mind, goin' down to Newhall. I didn't say nothin'. I reckon Joe he tole you.'

Sunny was silent. She gazed at her father's gigantic form, slightly bowed now, and something in his attitude appealed to the mother in her nature. 'You're tired, dad. You ain't lookin' like you was gettin' your good sleep nowadays. You jest come up to the house and set down and smoke, and

mebby then I can talk to you.' And she gathered up the paddle and pole and swung the empty pack-sack to her shoulder. Smiling back at him, she started up the little trail to the cabin porch.

'No use arguin' with a gal — 'speshully your own,' soliloquized the old man, following her. 'Now if a woman can't make her way with you *sayin'* things to please you, then she'll be doin' things to please you, the nex' whipstitch. That jest make you feel like a ongrateful cuss — after that — ef she don't talk too much.'

Sunny brought the big armchair to the porch, and then his 'home' pipe and tobacco. Contrary to her usual custom, she remained standing opposite him, her back against one of the hewn posts and her supple arms stretched above her head with her fingers clasped together in the dark masses of her hair. Her head, slightly tilted back, brought her clear-cut profile against the background of the weathered brown timbers of the porch. She gazed at her father through half-closed lids.

Presently she dropped one hand to her breast and drew out a letter — *the* letter

from her brother Joe that Selden had found and left upon the kitchen table with the little book.

'Dad,' she began, ignoring his start of surprise, 'I been studyin' this letter of Joe's. I'm thinkin' likely you read it all right, but that you ain't *understandin'* it all right.' Her brows drew down in a little frown above her clear gray eyes. 'Now he says: "I'm comin' up-river to get away from a couple of fellows what has been doggin' me for a week, for the shootin' of Tommy Crogan."

'Now,' she continued, drawing a deep breath, 'Joe says they're after him for the shootin' of Tommy Crogan, but that don't say he *did* shoot him. They *expect* he shot Tommy.'

'Well?' said Mateel, shifting his leg across his knee. 'Well?'

'But he didn't!' asserted Sunny, smiling bravely in the face of her father's stubborn and melancholy disbelief.

'How do you know he didn't, Sunny?'

''Cause he said he didn't. And Joe never lied to a man or a woman yet — and he wouldn't — even about shootin' a man.'

'He never said so to me,' said Mateel

slowly. 'He jest come and said they was after him. He was runnin' away from the *law*. 'Why was he sca'd of the law?'

'I dunno about law, dad,' said Sunny, dropping to one knee and reaching her arm round her father's shoulder. 'But don't you understand? You acted like you thought Joe did it the minute he come home, and ever sence. You didn't ask him out flat. And Joe is jest as proud and stubborn inside as you and me, dad. He wouldn't 'a' said he didn't do it, 'cause it cut him deep, your suspicionin' him that way. He knowed I couldn't believe it, and he tole me right away that it was Grégoire la Croix, usin' his gun. Joe ain't no murderer, dad.'

'La Croix!' he exclaimed. 'And that skunk come up here tryin' to arrest my boy!'

Mateel's great, gray head sank slowly and his beard rippled over his chest in a white wave. He looked like some primeval god sitting in judgment — doubting, pondering, weighing the ways of men and beasts. Presently he lifted his head, and his far-away gaze vanished as he straightened his shoulders. 'Too quick to jedge my own kind,' he said. 'Howbe, suthin' inside of me kept

a-fightin' agin' the idea of Joe doin' such. Sunny, I reckon you're right. Thank the Lord for it, Sunny! Your ma was like that — always stickin' up for folks instid of suspicionin' 'em. Thank the Lord for it, Sunny! Now mebby I reckon I can spot out that new trap line and commence makin' forms for the winter trappin'.'

Sunny rose from her knee and stretched herself luxuriously. Mateel watched her with affectionate eyes. 'Dad,' she said presently, turning full upon him, 'dad — ain't you always a-trustin' me, no matter what I do?'

''Course I be!' he assured her warmly. 'And I allus will.'

''Cause your trustin' of me'll keep me trustin' myself and Joe. And I only got you — and Aunt Lib.'

'Yes,' drawled her father whimsically. 'And I ain't sayin' you *got* young Selden, but I reckon you could have him 'most any time you wanted to jest look at him twicet. Why, his eyes is jest a-poppin' after every step you take. 'Course he ain't said nothin', and he don't need to. But his looks is as noisy as a ole hen on a hot summer day.'

Sunny, balancing on her toes, dropped to her heels suddenly. 'You think he likes me, dad?'

'Likes you? Huh!'

Despite her natural buoyancy, she felt subdued. Suddenly an inexplicable shame burned in her face and tingled in her ears. She flung her arms round her father and hid her face on his shoulder. 'Dad!' she said softly, looking up at him sideways. 'Dad!'

'The grindstone's broke,' said Mateel, smiling.

'Grindstone?'

'Uhuh! Thought mebby you had a axe to grind.'

The girl thrust both hands against his chest, but with one great arm he held her for a moment. 'Don't mind my jokin' you,' he said tenderly, and unaccountable tears gathered in Sunny's eyes. 'I was that glad to know Joe tole you that he didn't do it. You was goin' to tell me that you liked young Selden. I knowed it. Now I saved you from blushin' to do it. If he does come around some day askin' you to marry him — and you jest can't help sayin' "yes," nohow — don't forget to tell him first that the Mateels

is mighty plain folks and poor and honest — bein' too poor to be anything else, I guess. Tell him we has always lived in the woods. He'll understand jest exactly what you mean by that.'

'But he knows all that a'ready, dad.'

'Yes. But he's a leetle young — yet — to know that sech cantelopin' around like that Aucassin and Nicotine business ain't anything like married life up here in the woods.'

And Sunny realized that, while her father, who had laboriously read, word by word, that 'Ancient Song' from Selden's little gift book, had made no comment at the time, he had not been as indifferent to the spirit of the tale as he had seemed.

CHAPTER XVI

Selden took his arrest as a joke until the evening of the second day of his confinement in the little log storeroom back of the general store. He paced round his gloomy quarters, regretting, as much as anything, the fading of the afternoon light from the chinks between the logs. 'Couldn't get away if I wanted to,' he said. 'That old fool Newhall treats me like a desperate character. Hello! I didn't notice this keg had been opened. Huh! Spikes. They're constructive. I need a saw, or an axe.'

He smiled as he filled his pipe and lighted it. 'Evidently he is willing to trust me with matches,' Selden soliloquized. 'Said I might smoke if I were careful. Well, he's got some sense left to realize that dynamite and fire are not my individual tools.'

His pipe glowed in the dusk. He wondered how soon the clerk would arrive with his supper. He was hungry. Besides, he wanted a word with the clerk. From the store in front came the sound of some one entering,

walking about, talking, and finally departing. Selden listened intently for a while, then lapsed to his former stolidity. Again some one entered the store. He could hear the pad of moccasins and the creak of the wide boards. He heard talking and presently a laugh, clear, low, and musical. He started and was all attention.

'I could swear that was Sunny's laugh,' he told himself. 'But what if it were? I'm here and she is there. Probably she has been told that I'm on my way to Saint John's.'

For a while he sat musing. He thought he heard a scratching on the timbers of the wall. 'Three,' he counted. Then 'Three' again. 'Think I'll move over to that side and listen.'

With his ear to the wall, he counted the sounds once more. He replied in kind. 'Oh, hang it, get down to the Morse code!' he said, laughing.

From a crack near his head a bit of paper fluttered, and in the fading light he picked it up and read: 'Shingles. Sunny.'

'Illuminating,' he reflected. 'And consoling. "Shingles." They're outside. "Sunny,"

she's outside. Perhaps her dad's around somewhere, too. "Shingles"?'

He glanced above his head. A few feet above was the beginning of the roof. Standing on the keg, he was able to reach it with his hands. Without hesitation, he pressed strongly upward. Several of the long, cedar shakes with which the place was shingled gave way. He reached through and tore several more from the round, unhewn rafters. Then he pulled himself up and dropped clumsily to the ground outside. Getting to his feet, he glanced round in the dusk. He saw a faint star. He could hear voices out in front of the store. Down toward the river a dog barked. On his left, and flattened against the timbers, was a dimly outlined figure.

As he started back, Sunny stepped toward him. Her hand was on his arm. 'S-s-s-h, Ward! Not that way! Come round this side.'

He felt her tremble, and he spoke quickly: 'Sunny, I can get away now. Don't you get mixed up in this. I'll manage. Why, you're shaking with fright now.'

'With what?' she asked quickly.

'Why, nervousness ——' he began.

'Nervous, nothin'! I was a-tryin' not to laugh out loud at the way you come down jest like a frog. And you grunted, too.'

'Well, I know that I cut my hand on some broken glass. That's funny also.'

'Oh, now, Ward, you're jest a boy, after all, ain't you? But we got to hurry.'

She stepped quickly away toward the edge of the distant woods, Selden following silently. When they were safely within the shelter of the trees, she stopped suddenly. 'Oh, Ward, you got any tobacco?'

'Yes, plenty of it. Why?'

''Cause I forgot that. I got everything else Joe tole me ——'

'*Joe* told you?'

'Yes. I was in the store afore I come round back. I come with Aunt Lib Putter. Reckoned you'd hear me laugh and kind of expect me. I laughed on purpose.'

'Well, you're an expert, then. It sounded natural enough to me.'

'I jest didn't have to try *much*, knowin' how I was goin' to get you out and fool ole Newhall.'

'But, Sunny, people will talk about this.

You're taking risks. Great Scott, Sunny, I'm grateful! I would do anything for you, but it doesn't seem right to ——'

They had come to the edge of the river. In the darkness he could not see her face, but he judged her expression from her voice.

'Dad is makin' stretchin' boards for the winter trappin'. I tole him I was comin' up to see Aunt Lib — so I took my canoe and come. Me and Aunt Lib come over to Newhall to buy some things. They's nothin' against that, is they?'

'But you, down here, and helping me to get away ——'

'Oh! Well, Joe is about two rods from here. He took my canoe when he come down-river. You needn't to worry.'

Sunny whistled. The call of the little whitethroat answered her.

'That's my brother,' she explained. 'He's goin' to Saint John's too. He ain't safe this side of the line — but he didn't do that shootin'. It was Grégoire la Croix, the man you come to our house with.'

As she spoke, a figure appeared in the dusk. 'Joe!' she called softly.

'All right, Sunny. Hello! You're Selden.

Sunny told me. Shake! I owe you one for puttin' it on the breed La Croix. You beat him at his own game. Pretty good for a city man. Goin' to Saint John's, so Sunny says. So'm I. Got to go quick. We'll travel together, eh?'

'Glad for the chance,' said Selden heartily. 'We're in the same boat this time.'

'Yes,' said Sunny, 'and it's my canoe, too. Now, Joe, don't you go takin' all the chances you know how jest because you are lucky. If you break my canoe ——'

'I'll use her just as if she were a soft-boiled egg, Sunny. Goin' to be a moon pretty quick. Good-bye. We're goin' to slide. Good-bye, Sunny.'

'Good-bye, Joe. But ain't you got nothin' you want me to say to Dad?'

'No. But you might say I got away safe.'

'Good-bye, Sunny,' said Selden, extending his hand. 'I'll write and let you know how I make out. I'll tell your brother how your father stood between him and the two men who were after him on the river. They shot twice, and your dad didn't flinch a hair. I think probably Joe doesn't know that.'

'Will you?' she asked eagerly. 'Now that'll pay me for the lecturin' Aunt Lib Putter'll give me when I get back.'

Joe Mateel had launched the canoe, and stood, setting pole in hand, waiting for Selden. As the latter turned toward the boat, a third figure sprang through the stunted cedars. Selden dodged, but he was too late. The man was upon him. Without a second's hesitation the young engineer struck out and up, heaving his shoulder into the blow. Without a sound, the man crumpled up and wilted to the rocks.

'Good one!' exclaimed Mateel, who had leaped to help Selden. 'Say! You can travel with me right along.'

Selden turned quickly to Sunny. 'Run!' he said. 'Before he comes out of it!'

'But maybe he's hurt.'

'Quite probable. I didn't hit for fun. I don't know who he is, but ——'

Joe Mateel, chafing at the delay, whirled on his sister. 'Sunny, you git!'

And, strangely enough, Sunny, perhaps subconsciously influenced by the habit of earlier childhood, obeyed with alacrity.

'Who was it?' asked Selden, a few minutes

later, as Joe Mateel, doubled up in the stern of the canoe, laughed till the boat trembled.

'Who was it?' echoed Mateel. 'Didn't you know? You hit him as if you did. It was old Ezra Newhall.'

CHAPTER XVII

As Selden's eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, he became alive to the ruggedness of the stream they were traveling. One moment, and a bulk of rock seemed to speed toward them, sweep to one side, and pass with a sibilant rush. The canoe, in reality traveling rapidly down-river, seemed to be standing still. Not until they ran afoul of a floating log did Selden realize that his companion was not alone running the river, but was putting forth every effort to make speed. The log slid under the bow of the canoe. Selden held his breath as Mateel, stooping to the pole, shot the craft over the wallowing, slime-covered log. Selden let go the breath he had caught and caught another quickly.

Mateel laughed. 'She'd 'a' dumped us if we hadn't hit her fast, before I punched her up with the pole. Can you swim?'

'Yes. I'm not afraid of getting drowned. What gets me is the strangeness of everything. Awhile back I was looking at the water and imagining it was fathoms deep.

Then right there I saw the tops of the river grasses and felt the canoe touch bottom several times. Gave me a queer sensation.'

'You ain't used to it, that's all,' grunted Mateel. 'Some of the best rivermen we got ain't worth the trouble of drowndin' when it comes to workin' a bateau or a canoe in the dark. Why, Sunny can give some of 'em pointers. Reckon it comes kind of natural, like shootin' and trappin' and such.'

'Yet you spoke of my not being used to it.'

'Well, that's part of the game. Now I know this river like my own clothes. Don't seem nothin' to me. It's been my work since I was fifteen. You can't make a feller a good canoeman just by practicin'. A good man on the drive, or in the canoe, or trappin' or huntin', or even fishin', is born that way, same as a good hoss-trader. Workin' at it helps, but it has to be in a feller's blood.'

'I imagined so, in your case, that day you ran Nelson's Falls and took the right-hand channel past the Grindstone.'

Mateel laughed boyishly. 'La Croix and the sheriff got dumped. Knew they would. Knew they would follow me, for neither of 'em had run just that piece of the river be-

fore. Used to carry around. If they hadn't got dumped, the old man would 'a' slipped his pole under their canoe and upsot 'em a-fore he'd let 'em catch me.'

'He did a bigger thing than that,' said Selden quietly. 'He stood up and let them blaze away at him after you flashed past. He didn't flinch. One bullet hit the rock and dusted me, and another struck alongside the canoe. You were right in line, and I guess they didn't see us at first.'

'So La Croix was pottin' at me, eh? Didn't hear it. Reckon I was too busy, and the rips are noisy right there.'

Mateel became silent. The click of the setting pole came regularly as they sped on down the darkened river. An edge of the moon rounded over the trees of the eastern shore, silhouetting a tiny, pyramid-shaped spruce-top in its center, black on burning silver.

Presently the canoe swerved, and Selden saw that they were crossing the river. They were dropping in a swift diagonal toward the left-hand shore.

'The boys always camp on the right-hand side goin' down, and on the right-hand side

comin' up-river. If they do follow us, they'll be lookin' for our camp on the right side. I aim to let 'em get past us and then we'll turn in and get some sleep.'

'And pass them later in the night, when they have gone into camp below?'

'That's it.'

'Do you think they will send any one after us, from Newhall? I doubt it.'

'Well, you needn't to, after that jolt you give old Ezra. He'll try and get you now harder than ever.'

They landed, and Selden carried the pole and paddles up the slope and returned for the packs. Mateel shouldered the canoe, and, carrying it up the bank, hid it in the brush. 'I'll get a fire goin' back here from the edge, and we'll fry some of Ezra's bacon. 'Tain't the first time I cooked his bacon, neither. You can fetch up some water. We got some hard-tack, so coffee and bacon and sailor bun'll go pretty good.'

'But, Mateel, won't they see the fire and smell the bacon and coffee? Why, I'm so hungry I could smell an empty coffee-pot a mile to-night.'

'Well, if they do smell it, course we can't

stop 'em, or invite 'em to grub with us. You see, by the time they get a whiff of our cookin', it will be too late to call. They'll be right on top of the worst part of Sawyer's Rips and can't turn back to supper.'

'That is what the noise is about below?'

'Yes. And you didn't know it, but we come pretty nigh runnin' them rips ourselves. I got a leetle too far down before I commenced to cross over. I was thinkin' of what you said about the old man — my dad.' Slowly the full moon rounded above the woodside and cast a bluish white radiance on pine and spruce, on fir and cedar and hemlock. A black bear, lumbering through the birch grove near the river, paused and sniffed suspiciously, suddenly rising to an upright position with nose elevated and nostrils like a pig's. The moonlight glistened on his black pelt, wet from crossing the stream. Presently the bear dropped to the mossy ground and rolled luxuriously, again to rise up and sniff the fragrance of frying bacon. Above him, on an arching limb, an awakened red squirrel peered down timidly, his tail quivering. Had it been daytime, he would have censured the bear roundly. Finally the black

shape swung away and shuffled out of sight, grunting. With the smell of the bacon came an odor that spelled caution. The bear was old and had bought his wisdom with many scars.

Opposite Selden, Joe Mateel squatted by the tiny fire, munching hard-tack and bacon. Selden, who had just finished drinking his coffee and was about to pour himself another cup, was surprised when Mateel grabbed the pot from his hand and emptied it on the fire. A puff of steam arose, and the fire went out with a sounding hiss.

Selden half rose to his feet, but Mateel pushed him back. 'Newhall boys!' he whispered.

Then Selden, crouching behind a cedar, peered out, and saw a canoe whirling down the swift current. Following it came a second and a third. None of the men were poling, but running 'on the paddle,' noiselessly.

As the last canoe came opposite to where they were concealed, the man in the stern, an Indian in Newhall's service, glanced toward the bank on which they were camped. Selden saw him shift his paddle and bear

heavily on it to cross to the left-hand side.

'The only one in the b'ilin' of 'em that knows anything,' whispered Mateel. 'Sure enough he's smelled somethin'.'

The moon, drifting higher, silvered the black water as the Indian's paddle spread a fan of ripples at each stroke. Slowly the canoe crept toward the concealed watchers, although it was drifting swiftly downstream in the sweeping current. The Indian spoke to his companion. Suddenly the canoe came about cleverly, facing upstream.

'Got to stop that,' said Mateel. 'He's goin' to call on us.'

'Are we going to run for it?' queried Selden, tense with excitement.

'Run nothin'! They're goin' to run. We're goin' to finish our supper — in a minute.'

Reaching behind him, Mateel pulled his rifle from its case.

'Say! Mateel! Not that ——'

'You set still, mister. It's a good light — and I ain't goin' to hurt nothin'.'

Slowly the riverman lowered the muzzle of the carbine. Selden held his breath. What

was his companion about to do? Surely not ——

'Whang!' snarled the thirty-thirty, and the shaft of the Indian's paddle flew into a myriad splinters below his hand. Mateel rose to his feet, and, parting the branches, stood in plain view of the canoemen.

'Now, Charley,' he called to the Indian, 'run *Sawyer's* on the paddle. That'll keep you from thinkin' too much of anything but your job. When you ketch up with the rest of the boys, tell 'em Joe Mateel's up-river, eatin' supper, and will be down to see 'em pretty quick.'

CHAPTER XVIII

As the helmless canoe swung round in the swift current, the bowman passed his paddle back to the Indian. In an instant they were lost in the darkness of the shadowy western shore.

Joe Mateel, displaying the utmost composure, kindled another fire and made fresh coffee that they might finish their interrupted meal. His concentration on the task of the moment amused Selden, who laughed.

Mateel, grinning, glanced up from the little fire.

'Kind of enjoy it myself,' he admitted. 'Howbe, they sure will lay for us now. I was just figurin' how to slip 'em up. They won't come back up for us right away. They're all busy about now keepin' out of the water.'

For a minute the riverman ceased coaxing the fire with his hat. 'Got any relations?' he asked presently.

'How's that?'

'Got any folks expectin' you home, or that

you're takin' care of — a — a mother, or a sister or brother or somethin'?'

'No. No one.'

'All right. That's settled. Now you ain't thinkin' of gettin' married, be you? They's no girl a-waitin' for you somewhere?'

Selden smiled. The other's frankness had not the least tinge of curiosity.

'All right. Reckon you're as free as I am. Now you think mebby that the boys down below is sca'ed off. Well, they ain't. They'll get us if they can, and they won't do it with gloves on, neither. Now we might as well be drownded as back in Newhall, just now, eh?'

'Almost as well. Why?'

'What's your front name, anyway?' queried Mateel.

'Ward.'

'All right, Ward. I just want to say there's no laugh comin' runnin' Sawyer's at any time. But at night and on the wrong side of the channel, as I'm figurin' to do it, it's takin' four chances to nothin' that you get dumped. I *did* run the left side once. I was in a hurry, but it was daytime then. There's some moon, but it won't last long. The Newhall boys, 'specially Injun Charley, will be

watchin' and waitin' for thee, as the song says. They'll camp at the foot of the rips, now they know we're up here. Now it's this way: We can leave the canoe and make it by trail to Saint John's, or we can take a chance on the left side of the rips and save four days' walkin', if we get through.' Mateel paused and lifted the bubbling coffee-pot from the fire.

Selden, smoking and watching him, pondered. Presently he took his pipe from between his teeth. 'I've got a lame leg,' was all that he said.

Mateel laughed. 'That's the how!' he exclaimed. 'I never did like to walk when they was enough water handy to float a canoe.'

Hastily gathering up their few utensils, they embarked. As a precaution, Mateel lashed his rifle and the bow paddle to the thwarts. Then he had Selden sit amidships on the bottom of the canoe. Stripping off his moccasins, the riverman tied them by the thongs to his belt. 'Scared?' he asked, as they plunged toward the ominous roar of the rock-strewn and dusky river bed.

'Yes,' replied Selden frankly. 'Why shouldn't I be?'

'Well, you got a right to be,' called Mateel, bracing himself as they crashed into the first lift of the rapids.

The canoe soared, hung for an instant, and shot down into a moonlit turmoil of waters. Rock after rock glanced past. Once they struck, and Mateel threw all his weight on the setting pole to ease the little boat over the sunken boulder. Twice they plunged, bow down, through the backlash of crowding waves that washed inboard.

Selden gritted his teeth and wished for something to do — longed for some physical action as a relief to the nervous tension. He realized keenly how his companion had earned the nickname of 'Wild.'

For one tense moment he questioned Mateel's sanity as the canoe swung round and drifted dizzily stern first toward a barrier of dim, wave-washed rocks, glittering and black in the moonlight. Then he appreciated the other's skill, for, as they dropped between the bite of rock and rock, Selden felt the canoe checked; and, as they slowly worked upstream again, he saw that Mateel had purposely dropped through stern first that he might immediately work to the

right and out of the pocket of rocks by poling a few yards upstream. Had they run between the rocks bow first, they would have had neither time nor room to turn and escape the second and immediately impassable barrier of rocks below them.

As they 'straightened out' again and ran on downstream, Selden caught the faint gleam of fire — a red spot that glowed and diminished on the opposite shore. He gestured toward it, and Mateel, shipping his paddle, with which he had replaced the pole, crouched in the stern of the canoe, watching the eastern bank.

Slowly they swung round in the eddy below the rapids. Anxiously Selden turned his head to catch the glimmer of the red spot as they again pointed downstream. In front of them lay a narrow streak of moonlit water, illumined through a lane in the trees of the far shore. Once across that bar of light, and Selden knew they would be practically safe from immediate pursuit. The gleam of red was the camp-fire of the Newhall boys, who little expected Joe Mateel to keep his word and come down upon them before daylight.

Again the canoe swung round, and the

clear-cut edge of a strip of rocky and untimbered river-bank struck sharply against the moon. Even as he looked, three distant figures strode along the moonlit crest. Selden turned his head and glanced at Mateel, who nodded.

'They're goin' back up the river trail to jump us while we're asleep. They'll find a cold camp. Old Ezra must 'a' made 'em a good figure for them boys to risk disturbin' my sleep like that.'

'Strange, the other three on shore didn't see us cross that streak of moonlight,' said Selden, as they rounded the bend below the rapids and paddled quickly downstream.

'That's because they was all took up watchin' their friends cross that place on the other bank. They *expected* to see 'em cross it — and they weren't expectin' us.'

'If they had seen us?' said Selden tentatively.

'Well, it's all dead water — stiller than a graveyard in the woods — from here to Saint John's. 'Bout nine miles, I reckon. If we couldn't 'a' dodged 'em along shore somehow, we'd 'a' had to take to the brush. Six of 'em might of got us. If they'd stuck

to the canoes — well, mebby I'd 'a' winged one or two of 'em chancin' that would scare 'em all off. I don't like to do that. Them boys is poor, just like me, and bein' laid up costs money. Then, mebby they'd 'a' winged us. Can't tell just how mad they was. Anyway, they'd 'a' been some het up afore they got us. Yes, some!'

CHAPTER XIX

Clement Uriah Putter, or 'Uncle Clem,' as his Newhall friends called him, differed from them essentially in that he had a goatee and a pension. This latter distinction, meager as it was, enabled him to spend most of his time puttering, as Joe Mateel facetiously remarked, round home. Uncle Clem trapped a little, hunted a little, and worked a little less. His chubby and resolute wife, Aunt Lib, spent her time in cheerful industry about the home, in the garden patch, and, when winter came, in the placid contentment of knitting innumerable socks and mittens for which the lumbermen paid her well. When her goodman was at home, she vigilantly checked his occasional lapses into the highly colored and picturesque vernacular of the camps. When he was absent, she worried about him until he returned. When their immediate little world swung smoothly, they united in a congenial criticism of Newhall Settlement, 'horse, foot and dragoons.' When the Settlement had been theoretically readjusted and Uncle

Clem had lighted his third pipe for the evening, Aunt Lib never failed to introduce Sunny Mateel's name.

Sunny was the unvarying *pièce de résistance* of their scant and primitive menu of gossip. They loved her as if she had been their own. She was their niece by adoption. Her beauty, her ignorance, her natural cleverness, her frankness, native wit, and her future were discussed until the discussion wound and intertwined itself into such a speculative tangle and took on such a romantic effulgence that Sunny became the veritable child of their imagination. Together they bore for her a multitude of hopes and fears, as conscientiously as though she had been their own daughter.

Quaint and lovable as they were, these folk of a generation past barely escaped being caricatures to the Newhall settlers. Aunt Lib's immaculate household and her unquestionable veracity won for her the respect of her distant Newhall neighbors, despite their 'up-to-date' vulgarities. Uncle Clem's linguistic ability, especially under stress of circumstance, placed him among the foremost of his associates.

'Clem Putter!'

'Yes'm.'

'Take your feet off'n the sewin' machine!'

'Yes'm.' And Uncle Clem's chair clumped to the floor of the little room just off the kitchen.

Aunt Lib bustled about the stove getting supper. The October evening was crisp and starlit. The ham and eggs had a delicious, almost an inspiring, fragrance. Uncle Clem was affected. His head was turned toward the kitchen. He sat with one hand grasping his goatee, quite as if he had pulled his head round with it to watch Aunt Lib.

'Why, Clement Putter! If you ain't got a hole in them socks a'ready!'

'Yes'm.'

'They was clean washed and darned when you put them on this blessed mornin'.'

'Yes'm.'

'And you got a hole in the heel a'ready.'

'Yes'm.'

'Well, how did you get that hole in 'em?'

'Ye — um — eh — walkin up so peart to get home to you'm.'

Aunt Lib smiled happily as she turned the slice of ham. She was pleased, but Clement

was not to know it. 'Home to your supper, more likely!'

'Yes'm.'

Aunt Lib was not pleased. 'Say no'm oncet, Clem, if you ain't forgot how.'

'Yes'm.'

'There you be with your feet on that sewin' machine again. They're big enough without you stickin' 'em up so suspicious-like.'

'Yes'm. Thought mebby if I stuck the holy one under the needle and worked the treadle dingus with my other foot, mebby I could sew up that hole afore you seen it.'

'My! But you're gettin' smart, Clement. You ain't talked so much before your supper sence the hard cider give out las' spring. You got suthin' on your mind. Been to Newhall to-day?'

Uncle Clem shook his head. Then he again seized his goatee as if to steady this method of negation to a non-committal poise.

'Find that axe you lost last winter in the sugar camp?'

Again he shook his head.

'You seen Sunny to-day?'

'Yes'm.'

'Uhuh! Then that's it! Well, supper's ready, Clement. You put on your shoepacs and draw up. No use askin' you any news while you're eatin'. Reckon I can wait till you're filled up.'

'Yes'm.'

Aunt Lib sighed. She poured a cup of tea for her goodman and one for herself. He reciprocated by passing to her a portion of ham and two eggs. Aunt Lib sighed again as she poured a careful spoonful of ham gravy on a half-biscuit. 'Sunny ain't ailin', be she?'

'Who? Her? Sunny? No-o-o, not just ailin'.'

He fixed Aunt Lib with a vacant stare, chewing meanwhile quite vigorously.

'Well, Clement, you needn't to try and hyperize me. You only did that oncet, I guess, when you ast me to marry you — and got me to say yes. You — you think Sunny's thinkin' too much about that young Selden up to Saint John's. Is that it?'

Clement Putter studied his wife's good-natured face, or appeared to do so, for a long minute. His expression conveyed the sug-

gestion of a delicate hesitancy between taking another mouthful of ham and making an intelligible reply. Aunt Lib stirred her tea with undue vigor.

'Yes'm.' And Uncle Clem forthwith became the possessor of another mouthful of ham and egg. Meanwhile he displayed a singular dexterity with a hot baked potato, the skin of which he juggled to a final emptiness without a single verbal accompaniment.

Aunt Lib was mildly amazed. 'Clem, be you feelin' well?' she asked.

'Yes'm.'

'I calc'late you'd say "Yes'm" if you was a-dyin'.'

'Yes'm. But I ain't.'

'No, it don't look like it. Was Sunny feelin' downsome-like, or peartsome-like, as usual?'

'Yes'm.'

'*Clement!*'

'P-p-peartsome-like, as usual, Libby, I guess.'

'But you said she was thinkin' too much about that young Selden. How do you know that?'

'Uhuh! She was.'

'Did she say anything leadin' you to suspicion she was thinkin' of him?'

'Yes'm, uhuh!'

'Clem, you sound jest like a cow talkin' confident to a spring calf!'

Uncle Clem took refuge, so to speak, in manipulating a second plateful of baked potato and ham and egg. Aunt Lib gazed dreamily into the saucer of her teacup. The tea-leaf fortune in it was puzzling and not at all satisfactory. 'Well,' she said, with a sigh, 'if she *does* marry him ——'

'Or he was to marry her ——' interrupted Uncle Clem.

'Why, like as not, they'd just move away to the city ——' she continued.

'And forget all about her Aunt Libby and her Uncle Clem,' he concluded, drawing back his chair and surveying the empty platter and potato dish sadly. He still seemed disinclined to retail his visit with Sunny. He knew that Sunny's pie — baked to-day and warmed over Sunday — was intact in the cupboard. He wanted some of that pie. He mentioned it gently, suggestively.

'Now I like to forgot that pie!' exclaimed Aunt Lib, with brazen disregard of the

Saturday-night custom of no pie till Sunday. Uncle Clem wisely forbore to remark on the unusualness of this. A second piece, even, seemed ineffective as a stimulus to further conversation.

Aunt Lib began to fear that she had made an unnecessary and wasteful sacrifice to her curiosity. With some asperity she remarked: 'If all that pie and ham and eggs and potatoes don't put you to sleep afore I turn my back to wash the dishes, you might jest go on and finish about Sunny. Can't you see I'm itchin' to the soles of my feet to know? You're that stubborn!'

Uncle Clem chuckled, rose, and, feeling along the window sill, found his pipe, which he filled and lighted. Then he gazed at the ceiling. Aunt Lib washed the dishes with the quiet stealth of an officiating undertaker.

'Waal,' he began, tilting back his chair, 'she's too good-lookin' for him or any feller around here. She ought to marry some of them royal families and be a princess. She could look the part, all right.'

'Huh!' snorted Aunt Lib. 'How many families now ought she to marry? You been

readin' one of them Sunday papers from the city lately, down to Newhall?'

'Yes'm.'

'Thought so. Royal families! And you fit for your country oncet! Huh!'

'Now, see here, Libby!' said Uncle Clem, catching hold of his goatee as if to steady himself through the rising storm, 'I was jest imaginin' that. 'Course she's got more sense than that, even if she had the chance.'

'Folks do say young Selden is right in the office down to Saint John's, workin' up some big scheme,' said Aunt Lib. 'He was always a mannerly actin' young fellow. Sunny might do worse.' And Aunt Lib laid a polished plate gently upon the stack.

Uncle Clem cleared his throat. Aunt Lib, back toward him, suspended operations at the sink; that is, to the extent of only dabbing gently at the sink corners with her dishcloth.

'I seen Sunny to-day, down by the p'int toward Newhall. I was comin' along the river trail, and she was standin' lookin' across the river — lookin' toward the north. Her canoe was layin' half up the bank. It was right nippy cold, too, but she didn't

seem to pay no attention. She jest was leanin' on her paddle, lookin' straight ahead. I come up pretty clost behind her, and I says "Woof!" kind of loud. She didn't jump, not Sunny. But she turned around and looked at me a minute with them gray eyes jest kind of misty-like, from lookin' across the river so long, I guess ——'

'Yes!' exclaimed Aunt Lib breathlessly. Her plump hands were on her hips, and her elbows were high.

'And what you think she says?' asked Uncle Clem, grinning.

'Goodness to gracious, Clem Putter! How do you think I know?'

'She says: "Hello, Uncle *Ward!*" I dunno. My name used to be Uncle Clem oncet.'

Aunt Lib rattled the dishes busily. Her goodman, satisfied that his recital had been quite dramatic enough for the occasion, relapsed, and puffed his pipe. The cat's after-supper purr resounded in the silence like mimic thunder.

Aunt Lib dried her hands, rolled down her sleeves, and set the kettle on the back of the stove. 'I wonder what we can give 'em?' she said, half to herself.

Uncle Clem coughed. 'You seem moughty certain that Sunny's a-goin' to marry that there young Selden, Libby.'

'Just as certain as I was five years before you asked me, Clem. Reckon you forgot that. It's nigh onto forty years now.'

'Reckon I hain't. You was the prettiest gal in the village — and I was a'most sca'd to death 'bout then.'

'Scared of me?'

'N-n-o-o; of myself, Libby. But about givin' 'em somethin' if that gal do go and get married. Why, h'm! Good advice don't cost nothin' — good advice based on forty years of married experience and 'specially valuable afore folks gits married — if they take it. Now, I could tell Sunny ——'

'Clem, if you say one word to that child — either for or ag'in' gettin' married, or bein' in love with her young man, I'll ——' And Aunt Lib rose to her physically and morally effective highest. 'I'll cut off that goatee of yourn with the sheep shears some night when you're asleep. Then who'll ever believe you when you say you fit at Bull Run or Appymattox?'

CHAPTER XX

The northern 'line' of Jed Mateel's traps extended in a great loop toward Saint John's and was some eighty miles long. The loop swung back on itself not far from Mateel's cabin. That his operations encroached on Canadian territory he may or may not have known. In the fastness of the frozen wilderness, landmarks become obliterated. The uninhabited, bleak solitudes of snow and ice and silence discourage official investigation. The occasional free trapper of the North Country, much like his old-time brother, the privateer, bears no too fine distinctions in his calling.

Stray Canadian trappers, chancing upon Mateel's line, left his traps undisturbed. Those great, broad racquette tracks were known and respected. The father of 'Wild Joe Mateel' had the reputation of keeping his word to the letter — and in the unwritten code of the wilderness that letter was perilously strict in regard to the pilfering of furs.

It chanced that Mateel, making the round

of his line one November morning, came upon Ward Selden and one of the Saint John's men. Selden carried a transit, and his companion a light spotting axe and a chain. Mateel, some few rods behind them on the Great Heron River trail, slackened his pace instinctively, curious for a moment to see what they were about. Then, quickly bethinking himself, he hallooed, and Selden swung round, hesitated, and waved a welcoming hand.

'You're sure lookin' fat as a seal!' was the woodsman's greeting. 'Suppose we kin save time by not askin' each other what he's a-doin' on the wrong side of the line, hey?' And Mateel chuckled.

Selden smiled. 'Yes. I'm glad to see you. Was coming over, but I've been pretty busy. I wrote a letter to Sunny. I thought perhaps she might have read it to you.'

'If she got it she didn't say nothin' to me — and I reckon she would. But either you or me is on the wrong side of this here international boundary, I take it.'

'Yes. You are a few rods over the line. You see, the Great Heron dips into Canadian territory for several miles before it swings

back to the United States again. It runs almost parallel to the Nennassing, here, for a few miles. I wonder why they didn't use the Great Heron as the boundary all the way through?'

'That's a long story, havin' to do with the Injuns. I'll tell you about it some day, mebby. How you makin' it with the Saint John's folks?'

'Oh, well enough. I'm rather on probation, in a way. They don't know much about me, but I'm working out something that will help me to their notice.'

'Uhuh!' And Mateel glanced at Selden's companion, who stood a few paces down the trail.

'How is Sunny?'

'Right well, I reckon. Been worryin' a leetle about Joe, mebby. But I calc'late Joe's takin' care of hisself?'

'He's back in Camp 42—a long way from the main camp and visitors,' replied Selden. 'We've become acquainted, and we're as thick as thieves now.'

'Uhuh! Joe has his likes and choosin's. If he do like a man, he'll stick to him for keeps.'

'I believe it. Would you take a note to Sunny from me?'

'Reckon I could tote it. Go ahead and do your writin'. I'll set by and smoke a spell.'

'You know, Sunny didn't reply to my last note. Perhaps she didn't think it was worth while, or perhaps she didn't get it. This will explain, for I promised I'd write to her and tell her how I succeeded at Saint John's.'

'Reckon she didn't get that letter. Think mebby she would answer it if she did.' And Mateel took the hastily written note and stuffed it in his pocket. 'All right, son. Awhile back you was sayin' you expected to make good on some plan for the Saint John's folks. If you do want to make good, right here's about the best place to do it.' And Mateel swept a huge arm around in a large, illustrative gesture. 'I've thunk about it a hundred times — how the Great Heron cuts into Canady here, and what might be did on Canady ground, lookin' to — well, gettin' a head of water for a spring drive on the Nennassing, for instance. I see you're gettin' ready to peek at it through that leetle spyglass of yourn. Well, you take a long

look. It is wuth money if it's handled right.'

Selden's heightened color told that Mateel's generalities about the Great Heron and the Nennassing were more or less pertinent. 'I appreciate that, Mateel. I'll tell Joe I saw you. He'll be glad to hear from you.'

Jed Mateel shifted his traps from one shoulder to the other as he prepared to resume his journey. 'Yes, and if you don't mind, you could tell Joe I was mistook. And tell him I understand now.' And, without further speech or adieu, the big woodsman turned and crossed the rocky bed of the stream, leaping from boulder to boulder with the ease and agility of a boy. Again striking into his line, he swung through the dim woodland, a magnificent figure, white-bearded, straight-shouldered, well-poised. That indefinable something suggesting efficiency radiated from him as he strode along, at one with the keen vigor of that bright November morning.

CHAPTER XXI

SUNNY, who had returned from a visit to Aunt Lib Putter's, was just making biscuit when her father came in. To her astonishment, he flung his pack in one corner and his cap in another, and, seizing her beneath the arms, lifted her ceilingward as though she had been a child.

'Why, dad!' Her expostulation was smothered with a hearty kiss. Then, holding her from him at arm's length, he studied her face. 'Lookin' a leetle, just a leetle shadow of a guess slimmer than you was last summer. But, my stockin's! You're the best-lookin' gal in ——'

'Dad, you quit that! You been doin' suthin' you dassen't to tell me of, and you're jest carryin' on to cover it up.'

Mateel laughed as he brushed the print of her flour-covered hands from his mackinaw. 'Yes, I been up to suthin' pretty bad to-day. I mowed down twenty-two miles between here and where I done it — so as to tell you.'

'I know!' exclaimed Sunny, laughing. 'You seen Joe.'

'Nope!'

'Big Pierre!'

'Nope!'

'Césaire Garneau?'

'Nope! Now, why don't you quit foolin' and get down to business? You know who I seen.'

'I got to 'tend to them biscuits. If you didn't see Joe, the rest don't count.'

'Don't, eh? Then I reckon you don't want to see that letter I got in the left-hand pocket of my coat. It was give to me by a young feller with kind of light hair and ——'

'Letter? Oh, well, it don't amount to nothin', I guess.'

Mateel, rolling up his sleeves and turning back the collar of his flannel shirt, sought the washbasin. Sunny busied herself about the stove, apparently absorbed in the task of baking the biscuit. She did, however, glance occasionally at her father's mackinaw which hung near the door.

As she set the table, the thought of Selden, and the part she had played in his escape from Newhall, recurred to her insistently.

He had not written as he had promised, but had waited all this while, and she had waited until the joy of expectancy had become a mute indifference. It was not altogether a disappointment in not receiving the letter. Rather, he had failed to keep a promise, made hastily and lightly, perhaps, but a promise. *That*, to her, seemed ungrateful, almost unforgivable.

When they had finished supper and Jed Mateel was dozing in his big chair by the fire, Sunny came to him and sat on his knee.

'You been doin' suthin' you're ashamed of, and you're a-carryin' on jest to cover it up,' quoted the old man.

Sunny shook her head. 'Where did you see Ward?' she asked, after a pause.

'Ward? Ward who?' asked her father, feigning ignorance.

'If you're jest set on teasin' me, dad, why, I don't know what Ward. Bet you can't guess where I was to-day.'

'Aunt Lib's. Pshaw! That's easy.'

'Why?'

'Saw the blue clay on your moccasins where you crossed the edge of the branch down near the bog.'

'Well, I did go to Aunt Lib's. You might tell me about Joe.'

'Well, Ward says Joe is at his old place — Camp 42 — and they're acquainted some. Guess the Newhall trouble has blowed over a leetle. I tole Ward to tell Joe that — well, I was mistook, and that things was all right now.'

Impetuously Sunny threw her arms round her father's neck and kissed him. Her loyalty to her brother Joe was as unspoiled as it had been when she wore short dresses and ran barefooted after him through the woods. 'I'm glad of that, dad. Joe'll be glad, too. I wish I could see him.'

'Yes. I reckon he'd be glad to see both of us. Mebby if you had 'a' sot down and answered Ward Selden's first letter he might 'a' sent a invitation for us to visit the Saint John's camp, hey?'

'His *first* letter?'

'Yep. Said he writ you one afore he give me the one for you.'

'So he *did* give you one for me?'

'Yes. Guess he wouldn't resk sendin' it like he did the last. Some letters gets lost in that Newhall post-office. I'm mighty sure of that.'

Sunny was silent. One of the heavy braids of her black hair lay across her arm and shoulder. She knotted and unknotted the doeskin thong with which it was fastened. So Ward *had* written, and the letter was lost. And he had written again. She had thought unkindly of him. Although a sensible, healthy young animal, her emotions were touched as she recalled her mental arraignment of him. The slow tears came to her eyes, and she turned her head away. Despite the robustness of her nature and her occupations, to do injury to any one, even in thought, was to her natural honesty of heart a sin indeed. Hastily she brushed her hand across her eyes, and turned a smiling face to her father. Perhaps her tears had been tears of happiness, after all. Wisely she refrained from an analysis of her emotions. Rather, she rumpled her father's hair, brushed it softly with her palms again, and pleaded with her sweet gray eyes.

'It's in the left pocket of my mackinaw,' he told her.

She slipped from his knee and ran to get the letter.

'Ward thinks he's found the kind of work

he wants,' she said presently. 'Sends his regards to Aunt Lib and Uncle Clem and Ezra Newhall. Yes, him, too. Says he was hopin' to come over and visit us, but wasn't invited yet. He jest said that to be mean. He knowed he was welcome.'

'Mebby he jest says that to kind of see how we would take it if he did come over. 'Course he is welcome.'

Sunny folded the letter and sat gazing pensively at the cabin wall. 'Wish I had more schoolin',' she said presently.

Her father groaned. 'It's a-comin'!' he ejaculated. Then: 'I wisht you had, Sunny.'

'What's a-comin', dad? You gettin' the stomach ache?'

'No. Spring's a-comin' after Christmas. But don't you worry about eddication. If I ain't wrong about Ward, he ain't a-goin' to worry about it. I reckon you and me and Dan'l Webster on the clock shelf, thar, can answer that letter suitable, mebby.'

Sunny shrugged her shoulders.

''Course,' continued her father, 'I only was jokin' 'bout me helpin' on that letter.'

Something in his tone caused the girl to turn her head. She found him gazing at her

wistfully. She rose and came to his chair. 'Dad,' she said softly, 'I wouldn't say anything in a letter to Ward that I wouldn't jest as leave you'd see it.'

'Well, Sunny, girl, I wouldn't jest say *that*. But you and me do get along first-rate, considerin'. I'm about as handy as a bear at dealin' cards when I come to try to understand wimmen-folks. Since your ma's been gone, Aunt Lib and me tried to bring you up best we could, with Uncle Clem offerin' heaps of advice durin' the proceedin's. Nacherally I done the most of the raisin' of you, for Aunt Lib had her hands full keepin' Clem right side up. But you're like your ma was. We couldn't sp'ile *that* with all our fussin'.'

Sunny was unusually quiet, and her father, never prone to moralize at length, chuckled. 'Uncle Clem, he allows he's responsible for your good bringin' up. Says to me oncet — howbe he had been skirmishin' a leetle with the hard cider — that he was descended from the Puritans, which accounted for his sense of discipline. I tole him I reckoned he was, and, like lots of them old original campaigners from England in the early days, he

had kept on descendin' ever since. He got some het up about it.'

Sunny laughed. 'But Uncle Clem means all right, dad.'

'Yes, that's what friends allus say about their weak-minded friends, "they mean all right." So does a hornet when it's attendin' to its own business. But hornets don't allus do that.'

'I know Uncle Clem *is* a little lazy, and swears ——'

'Lazy! A *leetle* lazy! Why, Clem has to cut a switch and lick hisself to get hisself started uphill. Clem ——'

'Now, dad, you're making that up. I'm going to bed.'

'So be I. I'm some tired. Hard work, bringin' mail clear from Canady.'

He was just drifting into a restful sleep when Sunny called from her room: 'You awake, dad?'

'Uhuh.'

'Was Ward lookin' good, dad?'

'Fat enough to kill.'

'Happy-like?'

'What-like?'

'Happy-like?'

'Oh, jest middlin'.'

A long pause. Then a sudden question that partially penetrated Jed Mateel's drowsy brain. 'Is he lame yet?'

'No. I rubbed in some of that eel oil afore I went to bed.'

'I mean, is *Ward* lame yet?'

'No, I reckon not. But your dad'll be if you wake him up sudden like that again.'

'Why, I thought you were awake all the time. I was,' Sunny assured him as she tucked Selden's letter beneath her pillow.

CHAPTER XXII

Midway between Clement Putter's homestead and Jed Mateel's cabin, and somewhat to the south of the trail between them, were several acres of burned-over land, sparsely dotted with clumps of small firs and occasional seedling pines. On a low hill stood three mammoth pines, the sole survivors of big timber in that bush-grown and tangled acreage of rank grasses and charred twigs. Just beyond the pines, on the southern slope of the hill, an old, disused log hut squatted, serving as an infrequent shelter to an occasional wilderness prowler—a famished lynx caught in a sudden downpour, an inquisitive porcupine, or that lithe, stealthy black cat of the woods, the marten. The little red fox, however, gave the place all its solitude. Less wild, but infinitely more cunning, he never entered a place with but one avenue of retreat.

Toward the abandoned cabin, unseen until approached closely, Sunny led Uncle Clem Putter. She halted and pointed toward the

south across the light sheath of early snow. On the clear, keen air of that crisp November morning drifted a faint scarf of smoke, hardly discernible, in its dun evasiveness, against the steel gray of the atmosphere.

'I can smell it,' said Uncle Clem. 'But I can't see it. My eyes ain't as young as yourn.

'I smelled it from the trail this morning, and came over here to see what it was. There's some one in that old cabin. So I came down to see you, and get you to go there with me. Now, Uncle Clem, I'm going over to find out.'

'All right, honey. Come along.' And Uncle Clem started toward the three pines.

'No!' exclaimed Sunny. 'Like as not it's some breed trapper that don't know he's in dad's territory. You stay here behind these bushes and just wait.'

'Hold on, Sunny! Whoever he be, he's not there now. See them tracks, fresh, goin' toward the river? Canady moccasins, 'count of the heeltab, eh?'

But Sunny grasped Putter's arm and dragged him down behind the low firs. 'S-s-s-h!' she warned. 'He's comin' back.'

'Well, what be we scared of?' asked Uncle Clem. 'What we hidin' for?'

'I don't know,' whispered Sunny. 'But I just feel there's something queer goin' on. Let's wait and see.'

'Well, if you feel there's somethin' goin' on, there's sure to be. Sure as the almanac. Aunt Lib gits them spells and she's allus right. One thing that's goin' on is that I'm gittin' the rheumatiz kneelin' in this snow.'

Sunny, peering through the thick screen of bushes, moved a cautioning hand in Uncle Clem's direction as he knelt behind. Two men passed noiselessly. The man in the lead, a starved-looking, gaunt, broad-faced breed, ragged and wild, glanced nervously from side to side as he strode toward the cabin. Following him, and muffled in heavy mackinaw, came the lean, dominant figure of Erza Newhall.

Not until they had disappeared round the edge of the distant hill did Sunny relax and glance toward Uncle Clem. He nodded.

'It's him; La Croix, 'most starved to death, by his looks, and Ezra Newhall a-follerin' like a boy goin' to steal grapes. Guess you *have* found out somethin' what

needs lookin' into and watchin' out for. *Now* what you goin' to do?'

'The meanest thing I ever done yet,' replied Sunny, rising. 'I'm goin' over behind the cabin and *listen*.'

'Hold on, Sunny!'

'Uncle Clem, you wait here. I can run faster than you or La Croix or Ezra Newhall.'

'But, Sunny ——'

'They don't dast to lay a finger on me, Uncle Clem, even if they did catch me listenin'. I'm goin'.'

'O-o-h! A-a-h! Weugh!' groaned Uncle Clem, rising stiffly. 'A-a-all right, Sunny — seein' you're halfway there by now. Wonder what devilment Newhall's a-brewin' now? Weugh! That thar knee j'int's a-crickin' like a old wooden hinge. Nothin' ever sca'ed her, I reckon. But by Hick'ry Jackson! Them fellers'll see her tracks the minute they comes out of that shack. She wants to get back afore they get started. Reckon I'll jest mosey over kind of nacheral-like and see what's goin' on.'

Clement Putter had no particular reason to fear either of the men in the cabin, yet he mistrusted their actions in connection

with this isolated rendezvous. Despite his talkativeness and his general peculiarities, he was at heart quietly, almost stubbornly, courageous. He would have faced an invading army single-handed to protect Sunny. He pushed through the low firs, to see her hurrying toward him. 'Huh!' he grunted, halting with one hand shaped above his eyes. As she neared him, he saw that her face was pale and that she was breathing heavily. 'Why, Sunny ——'

'Hurry!' she gasped. 'I don't want them to know we've been here. Come!'

'But they kin read our tracks like a book in this snow,' said Uncle Clem as they sped down the trail toward her father's cabin, the girl ahead, running lightly. Uncle Clem followed at a limping trot. 'Dratted if I'll run another step!' he panted, subsiding to a walk. 'I ain't done nothin' to be sca'd about.'

Sunny stopped and faced him. 'Why — I'm not — scared,' she panted. 'I wanted to get away before they came out. We can walk now, I reckon.'

'Guess we'll have to, if there's goin' to be any "we" to it. My, but you're leadin' your uncle the sprightenest kind of a barn dance

this mornin'. What was they doin' in that cabin?'

'Uncle Clem, Ezra Newhall ought to be hung!'

'Oh, I allus knowed that,' said Putter, grinning. 'You jest found that out?'

'No. But let's keep walkin', and I'll tell you. You know dad heard that Joe saved Grégoire la Croix from bein' — bein' — put out of the way by the Saint John's boys. Grégoire was to go up North and stay there. Seems he liked to starved to death hidin' away — afeared to go into Canady account of the Hudson Bay Company bein' after him for debt, and afeared to stay here 'cause he shot Tommy Crogan. He said he did it. Joe made him.'

'Huh! You don't say!'

'Yes. And he promised not to come back. But he did. He just told Ezra Newhall that he found out Ward Selden was plannin' to make a cut in the Great Heron River and take the flow into Canada for the Saint John's Company next spring; for the drive. Ezra Newhall said he suspected as much for a long time. Well, they talked about Ward and Joe and dad and the Saint John's Com-

pany. Ezra Newhall seemed in a big hurry to get away from him. But he promised Grégoire he would fix it up for him to go to the Klondike and would give him money for the ticket and clothes if he would see that Ward Selden was put out of the way down at Saint John's. He told Grégoire that they was to be no shootin' or no knifin', but Ward Selden was just to disappear. Grégoire la Croix asked Newhall to get him some clothes and some whiskey and some grub. Grégoire is goin' to start for Saint John's to-night after meetin' Ezra Newhall at the burned mill to get his things.'

'So that's what honest Ezra's up to, eh? Well, we'll get your dad and put a stopper on *that* mighty righteous quick!'

'Yes and we got to let Ward know, and Joe, that La Croix is back here again.'

''Tain't necessary. We kin stop him right here.'

'How?' asked Sunny.

Uncle Clem pondered. 'Well, we mought ketch him at Newhall ——'

'Grégoire can get provisions at Newhall and be on the trail down the Great Heron and pretty near the line before we can get

dad and catch up to him. 'Course, if Grégoire don't see them tracks he might stay around and start to-morrow mornin' ——'

'That's right,' said Putter. 'We better git your dad right away quick!'

'We've just got to let Ward know ——' began Sunny as they neared Mateel's cabin.

'And Joe,' interrupted Uncle Clem.

'And Joe,' she said, her face flooding with color as Uncle Clem smiled grimly.

CHAPTER XXIII

Grégoire la Croix's taint of Indian blood came to the surface as, upon Newhall's departure, the breed saw the tracks made by Sunny Mateel's moccasins. He followed the light imprints on the thin snow from the cabin to the firs. Dropping to his knees, he studied Putter's tracks carefully. 'No vair beeg mans,' he muttered. 'No Mateel. But dat Sunnee ——'

He glanced up the trail toward Mateel's cabin, hesitated, and finally, with a curse, he hurried to his own shelter to reappear shortly with a tattered pack-sack on his shoulders. Swiftly he followed Newhall's tracks toward the settlement, overtaking him at the edge of the forest.

'Thought I said eight o'clock to-night at the mill?' questioned Newhall.

'Oui. Dat w'at Ah t'ink. But Ah don' laik to stay close to dat Mateel hees cabane. Ah go now.'

'Well — wait over by the mill. I'll bring you the grub and a coat myself. It'll be dark in half an hour.'

'Oui, dat ees bon. Ah wan' leet w'iskey an' some racquette. Mabbe she snow beeg in leet taime.'

'Snowshoes? Well, I guess that's so. But you don't get whiskey. You'll freeze to death on whiskey.'

'Non! Ah ——'

'See here, La Croix! I'm running this. I'll tell you what you get and what you don't get!' And Newhall turned and plodded toward the bleak desolation of the settlement.

La Croix skirted the clearing, slipped stealthily along the river edge, and hid beside the burned mill. Presently through the gloom of the winter afternoon Newhall loomed, bearing a bundle, and across his shoulders a pair of short, broad 'packers' snowshoes. He hastily dumped the bundle at La Croix's feet and unslung the racquettes.

'I charged 'em to ye,' he said hurriedly. '"Grégoire la Croix, deputy sheriff of Lomax County." Dated the bill back to where you was deputy. That's how it reads on the books, in case you don't do what you say. If you're aimin' to beat me out of 'em ——'

La Croix laughed bitterly. He dropped to his knees and began stuffing the things in

his pack-sack. 'Ah t'ink mabbe you get hall de pay for dees t'ing w'en Ah feex dat Selden, hein?'

'See here, La Croix, no shootin' or knifin' or like o' that. You stand in well enough with them Saint Francis Injuns to get 'em to kidnap Selden till past June. They's none slicker at doin' a job like that than them boys. When Selden's put away, I'll send the money to your missis at Au Sable — fifty dollars apiece for the two that help you. You get the four hundred I promised — but if you try any monkey work, why ——' And Newhall's pause was eloquently suggestive.

'Dat hall right. But eef you don' send dat monee — den Ah com' veet mah frens an' Ah keel you. Ah shoot you veet mah carabine fraum dat dam some taime. Dat hall.'

'You get a move on!' commanded Newhall, with a bravado not entirely genuine. 'I'll take chances on you.'

When La Croix rose from his knees, Newhall was gone. The breed slipped into the stiff new mackinaw, lashed the snowshoes to his pack, and swung it to his shoulders, but instead of taking the river trail toward

Saint John's, he retraced his steps toward the deserted cabin on the hill.

Within a quarter of a mile of it he circled through the forest toward the south, keeping well within the shelter of the rigid trees. Finally he deposited his pack and snowshoes beneath a low cedar, and crept cautiously toward the edge of the clearing round the cabin. In the heavy dusk of the winter night he was able to creep within a few paces of the place without being discovered should there be any one within.

Listening, he heard a smothered cough and an exclamation. Again came the sound of the cough, and a voice rumbled:

'Clem, mought jest as well go outside and bark as to do that. If the breed's anywhere near he's heard it. Reckon he's lit out fur good. Guess me and Sunny'll go along down to your camp for to-night, so as to git a good start in the mornin'.' And Jed Mateel, followed by Clement Putter and Sunny, stepped from the cabin, and, crossing the clearing, hurried down the river trail toward Uncle Clem's place.

La Croix, grinning, rose and ran back for his pack and snowshoes. He came boldly out

into the clearing, entered the cabin, and built a fire, over which he cooked some meat and boiled a pail of strong tea. With the first light of the new moon he left the place, and, crossing to the river trail, started on a trot toward Mateel's camp. Once he paused to take off his coat, roll it up, and hide it beside the trail. Then he trotted on, breathing easily, all the primitive Indian awake in his warming pulses. Down the long, cold trail he sped, a flitting shadow in the thin light of the crescent moon. An hour, and he was at the clearing round Mateel's cabin.

With hand and shoulder he tried the back door of the house. It was bolted on the inside. He seized a length of unsplit firewood and battered the door in. Lighting a lamp, he searched from room to room. In Sunny's bedroom he found what he wanted, a carbine, hanging in its leather case, and beside it a belt half filled with cartridges. Seizing the rifle and belt, he set the lamp on the kitchen table. He saw that the place had been made neat against a prolonged absence.

'Dat Mateel he mak' traverse to Saint John, Ah t'ink. Ah t'ink dey go by dat h'ole trap ligne, by gar! Nex' taime eet ees Gré-

goire la Croix dat tell dat Sunnee, "han's up!" — an' den ——'

Drawing the cartridges from the belt, he stuffed them in his pocket and flung the belt in a corner. He looked about him, debating with himself whether or not he should set fire to the place. Finally he blew out the light, and, shivering a little, started down the trail on a trot, the cartridges clicking in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXIV

Next morning early Jed Mateel and Sunny faced a heavy snowstorm as they left Uncle Clem's cabin and crossed the frozen river to enter the chill, silent fastness of the winter woods.

The old woodsman's true instinct for 'weather' had anticipated the early snow, and two pair of snowshoes hung across the pack on his shoulders.

Sunny, in short skirt and knee-length blanket coat, gay stockings, and high-topped moccasins, trod lightly behind her father, her bright face framed by the scarlet of her Canadian toque. To follow his pace was no ordinary task, and she regretted that the snow, while deep enough to make heavy walking, was not quite deep enough to call for the use of the racquettes. On snowshoes she could have easily equalized the difference in stride and speed.

Withal, Sunny was happy in that her father had consented to her accompanying him to the Saint John's camp. He deter-

mined to warn Selden and Joe of La Croix's reappearance. Moreover, he wished to see his son, and the journey would not take him much farther than his usual round of the traps. Sunny reasoned with herself that while she would be glad to see Selden, there would not be much to say. She had explained in her last letter to him the non-receipt of his first note, and she had written with her usual frankness of her mistaken loss of confidence in him, and had apologized for it.

While she was not aware of it, the fact of her apology had touched Selden more than anything she had ever done. He appreciated the fineness of character that had prompted her to this, and he knew the genuineness of her apology.

No, there was not much to say logically, but Sunny unconsciously longed for the swift gleam of admiration in Selden's eyes whenever she met his glance. No one, she thought, had ever looked at her quite as he had, giving homage to her beauty without offense. True, she had known admiration of a sort before, in the Newhall store, for instance, where the lumbermen had stared

at her with covert suggestiveness. And Grégoire la Croix. She shivered with disgust.

Why she should care for Selden, beyond the natural desire of youth to laugh and talk with youth, she could not understand. Her thoughts went far beyond her power to express them in speech. She felt and knew that he cared for her. He had told her that he had no relatives, no kin, but had been a foundling. He had known little of affection and much of hard work. He had spoken to her frankly and unaffectedly of his hopes and plans. And because he had spoken without self-consciousness, or a more serious intent than to be friendly with her, he had builded better than he knew. Unversed in subtleties, yet the girl's unspoiled instinct told her that his heart was clean. The hunger of youth for youth's eager confidences, youth's buoyant bonhomie, possessed her. Would he understand or misunderstand her visit? The keen pride of her nature chased the rich blood to her cheeks at the thought. She pushed back her toque and unbuttoned the throat of her mackinaw. Her father's huge form, striding regularly before her, seemed

unreal. Awake, she dreamed along the trail, plodding past snow-laden cedars whose weighted branches swept the snow beneath; past gaunt and rigid beech and birch and maple; past the dusky green of spruce and fir, till down the trail she caught a glimpse of the little half-way cabin of the 'ligne.'

Her father stopped and gestured toward the camp. 'We mought's well eat a bite and rest a bit, Sunny. We can't more'n make the Canady line and the second camp afore night. You tired?'

She shook her head and laughed, her face glowing with health and youth. Her fine gray eyes, her straight black brows, and rich dusky hair — starred here and there with a stray snowflake — and the sweet curve of her lips, half smiling as she gazed far away to some illusive dream future, held her father's eyes as with an enchantment. He sighed as he turned and plodded on down the trail. Sunny, swinging her toque by its tassel, came more slowly.

Shortly after they had crossed the Great Heron River that afternoon, both on snowshoes, as the depth of snow had increased

steadily, Mateel halted suddenly and swung round, peering through the slanting flakes.

'What is it, dad?'

'Don' know. Can't git it out of my bones that somethin' is followin' us. I don' know.'

'Lucivee, mebby.'

'Mebby,' grumbled Mateel, striding on again.

Through the gathering twilight of the afternoon came the shrill bark of a fox, intensifying the succeeding silence. Mateel shifted his rifle from one hand to the other, and plodded on. Sunny noticed that he carried his head bent and a trifle sideways, as though scanning the forest at the side of the trail. She was again thinking of Selden's letter when she saw, in a haze, her father's rifle jump to his shoulder. The spitting *whang* of the thirty-thirty ripped through the woods, and its echo met the report of another rifle, fired from the dusk to the right. She plainly heard the thud of the bullet as it struck her father. Then followed the click of the lever as he threw in another shell and fired again. 'Missed!' he exclaimed. His arms wavered. Slowly the rifle sank, and he staggered to a tree and leaned against

it. 'I'm hit, Sunny. Who did it, I dunno, unless ——'

'Dad! Oh — dad!' she cried.

'Don' know, less'n La Croix ambushed us.'

She picked up the rifle, glancing through the dusky stillness of the winter evening. 'Is it hurtin' you?' she asked breathlessly, coming to his side.

Mateel shook his head and coughed. A streak of red seamed his white beard.

'You got to get to the shack, dad — quick! You *got* to.'

'I'm a-goin' to, Sunny. I ain't dead yit, my gal. I'm a-goin' to live to git the fella that shot me.'

CHAPTER XXV

With a groan Jed Mateel sank to the browse bed in the shack. Sunny, scraping away the snow that had drifted in the open doorway, closed it, and, hastily unstrapping the packs, found the blankets. On the little platform of earth in the center of the shack she built a fire, and by its light slipped the coat and undercoat from her father's shoulders.

'It's gone clean through, I reckon,' he said, twisting his shoulder uneasily.

'Not through your coat at the back, dad. Can't you sit up a little so I can see?'

Mateel turned himself on his elbow, and rose slowly to his feet. With his knife Sunny slit away the soggy patch of shirt on his shoulder, and with it came a little, vicious twenty-five-thirty-five copper-nosed bullet.

'Went clean through,' said Sunny, hastily washing the wound with water made from melted snow. 'It ain't bleedin' much, dad. If it had been a soft-nose bullet, it would 'a' killed you.'

'Let's see,' said Mateel as she helped him

on with his jacket and mackinaw. 'Huh! A twenty-five-thirty-five, same as you had for that leetle gun of yourn for shootin' wild geese. Well, I ain't afraid of a leetle pill like that if I ain't bleedin' inside.'

'You jest lay down now, dad. I got to get wood for the fire, and for all night. To-morrow I'm goin' on to Saint John's camp for help. I'll get Joe.'

'They's plenty wood split and piled on the south side of the shack. I cut it las' fall. And you ain't goin' to resk goin' in for help. I'll be all right in the mornin'.'

'But it ain't far to the camp,' she insisted. 'It's jest across the Heron and northeast about six miles, ain't it?'

'Yes. But if it's La Croix ——' he began.

'Why, he's gone now, or else he'd stayed and finished his job — and you. He dassen't come around here ag'in.'

Sunny sensibly refrained from argument or comment, but with calm forethought cooked and ate her supper and prepared to sleep. Her father shifted his weight on the browse. 'Sunny, git me a drink,' he murmured.

She brought him water, and he drank greedily. She put her hand on his forehead and felt the pulse of oncoming fever.

'It's quit snowin',' said her father presently, staring at a square of starlit sky through the smoke hole in the roof.

'Yes. You go to sleep, dad. I'll sing "Barbara," if you will.'

'Well, now! You ain't sung "Barbara" sence Ward Selden come to our place.'

Sunny rose and brought in wood. She piled quite a quantity of it near the bunk. Then she came and sat, with legs crossed Indianwise, beside her father. Softly she smoothed back the long, silvered hair from his forehead. His eyes closed. Carefully she reached to his wrist and felt his pulse. He smiled. 'I'm tryin' to sleep, Sunny, but I got a burnin' hole in my chest. I'm tryin' to sleep, Sunny.'

With her hand slowly stroking his hair and her gray eyes fixed on the square of starlit sky framed by the smoke hole in the roof, she sang, in the quaint minors of the early days, her mother's song of 'Barbara.'

Mateel smiled, opened his eyes, closed them wearily, and drew a deep breath.

Sunny, heedless of anything save the immediate charm of the old-fashioned melody, sang on, of Barbara, the winter's night, the sleigh ride through the storm, the lover's question, all, to the end. Then taking up the plaint again, half crooning it, she sang more slowly and softly. Her hand ceased its slow movement to and fro, and rested on her father's forehead. She drew it away, damp with tiny beads of sweat.

Quietly she crept to the other side of the fire, replenished it, and snuggled in her blankets. Round about the isolated cabin the trees creaked softly or cracked shrilly as the frost rent their tense fibers. The low *hush* of the wind in the hemlocks came with the regular, easy sweep of the surf on a calm summer day.

Sunny, weary from the journey and the shock of the unwonted attack on her father, drew the blankets about her head.

'I feel jest like cryin',' she said to herself. 'And I could, if I jest let go. Reckon I better pray and save my feelin's to take me to Saint John's with.' She began the olden-time child's prayer that kindly Aunt Lib had taught her: 'Now I lay me ——' It had

heretofore sufficed, but it seemed inadequate now. Her manifold emotions demanded larger expression. She could not frame in words the bitter fullness of her heart.

CHAPTER XXVI

In the dawn of the gray and chill winter morning, Sunny arose and rekindled the fire, which she had replenished at intervals during the night. She spoke to her father, who did not answer. Alarmed, she knelt at his side and spoke to him again. In the flicker of the flames she saw that he breathed and was seemingly in a heavy sleep. Perplexed, she hesitated an instant. Perhaps it were better he slept undisturbed. She returned to the fire, made tea, and ate some camp bread and bacon. She melted more snow, and placed the little pail of water beside her father. Then, taking her snowshoes, she slipped out, closed the door, and began her journey to the distant Saint John's camps.

She knew that she would cross the Nennassing, as well as the Great Heron, before she reached the camps. The blaze of the trap line was a guide no longer as it swung round with the Great Heron River and ran back toward their home.

The early winter morning, sharp in its

still cold, nipped stealthily at her cheeks and fingers despite the heavy wool toque and beaver mittens. Once or twice she stopped to rub her nose and cheeks with the powdery, dry snow. Finally the keen exercise heightened her pulses to a pitch that warmed her through and through. The sun, rolling slowly over the giant pines, threw forked and diversified rays through their cloudy purple tops. The snow, shot over with paths of sunlight, glittered blindingly in contrast to the soft half-light of the interior woodland.

An hour of toil, and she had reached the Nennassing. Beyond its northern shore, and some three miles northeast, lay the Saint John's camps. Sunny estimated that her progress was about three miles an hour. She crossed the frozen river, and, taking a diagonal from the sun, plodded through the silent forest, pausing from time to time to 'line' her course by some prominent landmark. She did not realize that the small extent of uncut timber in her immediate territory was surrounded by a network of lumber roads extending from the main camp to the outer camps, but La Croix, who had followed her from near the shack, knew this,

and quickened his pace. Like a wolf he had slunk about the shack in the early morning, not daring to enter, as he dreaded meeting Jed Mateel. Yet the breed was positive that he had wounded the other — perhaps had killed him.

When Sunny left her father that morning, La Croix reasoned that she had gone for help. Undecided, he had waited until she was well on her way. Then he followed her, thinking to overtake her easily, but she had had a long start and he had spent a restless night. Not until she had crossed the river did he come within sight of her. She had stooped to tighten a thong, and he imagined that she saw him, for she arose and quickened her pace. He lengthened his stride. The girl must not reach the camps. If she did, Selden and Joe Mateel would be warned.

Climbing a rise of snow-covered rock, Sunny turned breathlessly to scan the trail up which she had come. Within forty yards was the half-breed, plunging along her trail, his lips curled back from his teeth and his gaunt face beaded with sweat. Her first instinct was to run, but she knew he could overtake her in a short race. She drew all the

courage of her health and strength to her aid, and, glancing up in natural surprise, called: 'Bo' jou', Grégoire! You're out early this morning!'

The half-breed, taken aback by her natural acceptance of his presence, slackened his pace, and stood gazing up at her, his eyes narrowed to mere slits of light. 'Oui — Ah'm jus' hout on mah ligne.'

'Yes. Going to the camp?'

'Oui,' he lied, glancing away.

'So am I. Dad got hurt yesterday when we were coming down the trail. Got shot by accident. It was nearly dark. Probably some hunter for the camps mistook him for a moose. He's big enough.'

The half-breed grinned, and Sunny could have strangled him. Her pleasantry had been deliberate. She wished to appear as unconcerned about the shooting as possible.

'Dad wasn't hit bad,' she said lightly. 'And I'm glad you're going to the camps, Grégoire.' La Croix's eyes gleamed. 'You know all the trails, and I know I'm safe anywhere with you. You see, I don't know this part of the country.'

'Hola! Dat ees bon!' laughed La Croix. 'Ve mak' to go to dat camp now, hein?' Then he added, with oily assurance: 'Mabbe you lof Grégoire some taime, hein?'

He had stepped close to her. She loathed him, and feared him, but back of all that lay a picture of her father, alone, stricken, perhaps mortally wounded. Almost as her lips framed a reply, she recognized as her own the sheath of the carbine that he carried. That explained the twenty-five-thirty-five bullet. The rifle *was* hers. She knew the wide, deer-hide lacing on the cover. She was positive now as to who shot her father. Here was the supreme test.

'Mebby — I — did — like — you — once — Grégoire.' Softly she said it, and the warring emotions in her heart trembled on her lips as she spoke.

La Croix drew a step nearer. 'Ma belle!' he exclaimed hoarsely, stretching out his arms.

Sunny, watching the hand that held the rifle, drew back a step, pretending a pretty confusion. La Croix dropped the rifle, and, pacing forward, took her in his arms. She shuddered as he bent over her and kissed

her on the lips. 'Hah! Ma belle!' he whispered. 'You lof Grégoire mooch!'

With all the calmness and deliberation she could summon, and with all the quick strength of her splendid thigh muscles she drew up her knee and kicked the breed in the abdomen. With a groan he fell back, gasping for breath. She leaped forward, grabbed up the carbine, and, jerking it from its case, cocked it, and leveled it at him. On his hands and knees he wavered, groaning.

'I ought to!' she exclaimed shrilly. 'Oh, God! I ought to!'

But there was no immediate need to shoot. The half-breed was sick.

Joe Mateel, driving his four big horses toward the main camp, glanced from side to side of the road. He wanted to whistle, but his lips were stiff with the cold. He made a few unsatisfactory attempts at 'Annie Laurie.' 'Dum dull — this totin' and teamin', and some cold, too. Sittin' still and freezin' to death's mighty onsatisfactory, at three and a half per day. Wish suthin' 'd happen so I could do suthin' to warm up.'

Slowly and with forge-like deliberation

the great, snow-clogged feet of the horses rose and fell silently, sinking deep into the feathery snow of the roadway. The steam went up from their backs, and their nostrils were rimmed with frost.

'Gettin' kind of heavy right here,' he remarked, jumping from the sleigh.

Over that particular grade, and about to climb back on the load, he hesitated, flung the lines from him, and, springing through the drifted roadside, ran heavily through the shallow depths of snow beneath the pines. 'Hi — ee!' he shouted as he saw La Croix fall backward. 'That's the stuff, Sunny! Give 'im another. I'm a-comin'.'

When Mateel was near enough to see the leveled carbine in Sunny's hands he slackened his pace. Walking up leisurely, albeit breathing hard, he greeted her casually: 'Hello, sis!'

'Oh — Joe!'

Striding to the breed, he kicked him in the ribs. 'Here, you! Get up and explain — quick!'

Sunny, leaning against a tree, one hand over her breast and the other clutching the rifle, breathed heavily. With head bowed

she stood, striving against the sobs that shook her.

'Funny you're so scared of that breed and he ain't got a gun and you have. Here, you're all right now, sis. What was the row, anyway?'

The girl lifted her head. 'He tried to — to kiss me. He did kiss me. I had to let him.'

'You had to let him?' growled Mateel.

'To get my rifle. He had it.'

'Oh! That's it. How'd he get it?'

'Stole it from our house after me and dad left for Saint John's.'

'What?' And the young woodsman drew back his boot, but Sunny grasped his arm before he could get to the prostrate figure. 'Joe!' she commanded. 'Joe! Don't you be a beast just because he is.'

'He ought to be killed,' growled Mateel.

'Mebby. But not by you or me, Joe. It's Grégoire la Croix. He shot dad last night. Dad's over in the line shack. He's alive, but I reckon he's hurt pretty bad, Joe.'

CHAPTER XXVII

As Joe Mateel reached for Sunny's rifle, she stepped away. 'No, Joe, not you — the law ——'

'What law? Where's any law but me — for him? Gi'me that gun!'

Again the girl stepped aside, deliberately drawing her brother away from La Croix, who had risen to one knee and was watching them. Slowly he drew up the other knee, and rose to his feet, glaring with the intensity of desperation at Joe Mateel. Sunny nodded slightly. The breed understood, and, turning, shuffled away. Mateel, intent on securing the rifle, forgot him for the instant.

'Sunny!'

'No, Joe; not you. It won't help dad any to shoot La Croix. And you can't catch me without snowshoes.' She backed away while La Croix staggered down the trail, broke into a trot, and was making good headway toward retreat when Mateel spun round. Realizing that he could not overtake the other in the snow, he leaped again toward Sunny. She evaded him easily.

La Croix, glancing back, broke into a terrified lope, darting between the trees. Mateel stood staring at his sister. 'Are you stuck on him?' he asked brutally.

'Now, Joe, cool off and listen. You'd 'a' shot him. No matter what he done — either shootin' Tom Crogan or dad, you couldn't prove it if he was dead. He's worth more alive. Would the law people believe you and the men from Saint John's, even if they swore that Grégoire la Croix said he did the shootin'? Folks knows they was all mixed up in that, too. Would they believe them? They *would* believe La Croix if he confessed he done it. Can't you understand? Now you wake up and get the team and help get dad to camp for doctorin'.'

Several hours later four steaming horses drew up to the camp office. McLean, the superintendent, stood knee-deep in the snow, talking to Joe Mateel. 'Take your father over to my camp, Joe. The doctor will be here to-night. I telephoned. Mrs. McLean is a first-rate nurse. My daughter Marion is with her and can help.' He nodded to Sunny. 'Just drive right up. Mrs. McLean expects

you. I'll ring up town again and see if that doctor has started yet.' Then the tall Scotch-Canadian plunged through the drifts back to his office.

Mateel spoke to the horses. In a few minutes the wounded man was carefully housed in the superintendent's roomy log camp and Sunny was explaining the shooting as best she could.

Mrs. McLean, a rosy, sweet-voiced, plump little woman, won Sunny's affection immediately. Marion, the superintendent's eighteen-year-old daughter, the fresh young image of her rosy-cheeked mother, was too near Sunny's age and too strikingly good-looking in her golden-haired pink-and-white perfection to be accepted otherwise than 'on trust' by Sunny.

'Oh, no!' exclaimed Mrs. McLean as Sunny displayed some diffidence about accepting their generous hospitality for herself. 'You're going to stay right here and help us take care of your father. We have plenty of room. The camp is almost too big to be really cozy. We have four bedrooms upstairs. We can't think of letting you go until your father has recovered.' And

Mrs. McLean smiled in a motherly fashion as Joe Mateel, mumbling his appreciation, backed out and closed the door.

A few minutes later, as Sunny sat gazing disconsolately into the wide, blazing fireplace, Mrs McLean came to her and, taking her mittens from her lap, smoothed the glossy brown beaver fur. 'You won't object, I am sure, if I adopt you right away and call you Sunny?' And the kindly face beamed upon the dark, troubled one in open admiration for Sunny's fine gray eyes, her brilliant coloring, and splendid, tumultuous black hair.

'I'd like that,' the girl said simply, glancing up and smiling.

Just then Jed Mateel called faintly. Sunny sprang up and entered the room where he lay.

'Isn't she stunning, mother!' said Marion McLean. 'And, mamma, whom did she mean by "Ward"? She asked if he were here — in camp — just now. Did she mean our Ward?'

Mrs. McLean smiled. 'Yes, Marion. I think she meant our Mr. Selden. You know, he visited the Mateels' camp for several

days. He was recovering from an accident. That was long before he came here.'

'Oh! But she spoke of Mr. Selden as "Ward."'

'So did you, dear,' said her mother again, smiling.

As Marion went slowly upstairs to arrange the guest room for Sunny, she pondered. 'I wonder if he calls her "Sunny"?' she asked herself. 'She is just a dear, and so beautiful — and *awfully* proud.' And she turned back the fresh white spread of the bed. 'I wonder if she will like me?'

From her own room Marion brought a great black bearskin rug — her choicest winter possession — and spread it in front of the bed. Again she went to her room and returned with her arms full of dainty linen, stockings, handkerchiefs, a pair of fluffy woolen slippers, and last, one of her own cozy, fleece-lined woolen nightdresses, a soft gray garment, beribboned, warm, and serviceable.

Wistfully the girl surveyed her offerings, hoping that the strange, beautiful guest might not be offended, but rather find in them a token of friendship — of affection.

'She will be just as cozy as I am these cold winter nights,' reflected Marion. 'Won't we have fun reading? If she really knew how much I shall miss my big bear, she would like me a little, perhaps.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

When Selden called at the McLeans' camp, Sunny met him with all her old-time frankness and geniality. 'Hello, Ward!' she said, extending her hand. 'You've changed some. Have you really found that goddess you was tellin' me about? You look some older and more grown-up, Ward.'

Selden smiled. 'But how is your father — eh — Miss Mateel?' And his hesitation was noticed by both Mrs. McLean and Marion, who had just entered the room.

'The doctor says dad's strong enough to get well again,' she replied, smiling as she saw unmistakable admiration creep slowly into his eyes.

'I won't ask to see him,' he said, turning to greet Mrs. McLean and her daughter, 'but if there is anything I can do ——'

'If you can keep Joe from goin' after Grégoire la Croix, and shootin' him, you'll be doin' dad and me a favor.'

'Joe and I are great friends,' said Selden. 'I'll speak to Joe.'

'Don't say too much, Ward. Joe is stubborn.'

'Mr. McLean told me about the accident and La Croix,' said Selden. 'I didn't think La Croix would show up again. I wonder what brought him over here. I understand he followed you and your father?'

Sunny nodded. She was about to tell Selden of the breed's real mission as Ezra Newhall's tool; in fact, to tell him all she knew and surmised. She wished to unburden her heart freely, even to speaking of her real solicitude for him and her haste to warn him, but the presence of Mrs. McLean checked her. And Selden also, she thought, seemed hesitant and unlike his real self.

Sunny's quick wit discerned Marion McLean as a factor in Selden's diffidence. A little jealousy tinged the happiness she felt at seeing him again. In reality, the presence of Marion and her mother had made Selden diffident — for Sunny's sake. He thought too much of her to risk cheapening her by assuming, in the presence of others, the old-time familiarity, much as he longed to do so.

For months he had idealized the absent Sunny. Naturally he found the pleasant

companionship of Marion doubly enhanced by the vision of the other girl's contrasted beauty. Marion's sympathy, comradeship, kindness, was, through his imagination, as Sunny's own.

He glanced from one to the other. How vivid the contrast! The slender, golden-haired Marion, low-voiced, sweet, eagerly sympathetic; and Sunny, almost boyish in her *camaraderie;* virile, overflowing with the vitality of irrepressible youth and strength. Although untamed, she had a natural grace of poise and movement that was matchless, inimitable.

'You must come as often as you can, Mr. Selden,' said Mrs. McLean. 'We shall all be glad to see you.'

Selden thanked her, and shortly afterward departed.

Many evenings he came, bringing with him as he entered the instant, crisp edge of the winter weather. Once he stayed to dinner, and was charmed by Sunny's ease of manner and her mastery of some erstwhile neglected domestic details. Evidently she was quick to learn and appreciative of the privilege. New vistas unfolded themselves

to him, and after dinner he dreamed, lounging in one of the easy-chairs, smoking and nodding an infrequent accompaniment to McLean's after-dinner dissertation on 'International Law.'

Sunny and Marion, heads close together, were immersed in some scholastic mystery, Marion answering the murmured questions of her companion as they turned the page.

Mrs. McLean, with her book open on her knees, sat gazing into the leaping flames of the huge fireplace. Presently she bade Selden good-night, pausing, as she passed Jed Mateel's room, to ask if he were comfortable. His voice, in reply, roused Sunny from her studies, and she rose and stepped to her father's room.

'Marion, you were up so late last night ——'

'Yes, mamma,' replied the girl, closing the book she and Sunny had been reading. She bade Selden and her father good-night, and joined her mother.

'What!' exclaimed McLean, glancing round. 'We're shamefully deserted, Ward. Well, about that argument for a protective tariff ——' And the shrewd Scotch-Cana-

dian superintendent of the Saint John's Lumber Company plunged again into a rather one-sided discussion, contented to have so good a listener.

At length Selden rose to go, and McLean, yawning, stepped to the door and glanced at the thermometer. 'Uggh!' he shivered, as Selden slipped into his mackinaw. 'It's about forty below to-night.'

'Is that all?' said Sunny, coming from her father's room. 'Oh, you're going! Good-night, Ward.'

'Good-night, Sunny.'

McLean climbed the stairs slowly, still puzzling over a problem born of his recent dissertation. For a second Sunny stood at the half-open door with Selden. Then, stepping outside, she closed it behind her.

As he breathed the keen winter air, Selden felt his heart leap and his palms grow moist and hot.

In the dim starlight the girl stood, bareheaded, silent, gazing at him. He drew his mittens from his hands, and, dropping to one knee, found her fingers and kissed them. He could feel her tremble at his touch. Rising, he held out his arms. With a sigh she

leaned toward him. He bowed his head above her upturned face, and her breath was fragrant and warm against his cheek in the cold of that bitter winter night. 'Sunny! Sunny!' he whispered. 'My own girl!'

She smiled up at him. Then gently pushing him from her, she stepped back, her hand against the door. ''Course — I — am!' she whispered. 'Or I wouldn't let you kiss me.' And there was an almost childish delight in her voice as she laughed softly. 'But you was so long findin' it out, Ward!'

He was about to reply when she interrupted him. 'Open the latch for me, Ward. It's frosted and might stick to my fingers.'

He drew on his mittens, and gently pressed the big, wrought-iron latch. A flare of light — redoubled darkness — and Sunny was gone.

Halfway to his own camp, he paused in his quick stride. 'She's just an angel,' he muttered. 'She's just an angel — but a very practical one,' he added, marching on again.

CHAPTER XXIX

The storm that followed buried the camps window deep and obliterated the winter roads, smoothing all to a vast white level beneath the cold brown and green of the forest. Along the north shore of the Nennassing the skidways were piled high with logs.

From the main camp McLean issued orders to the numerous outlying camps, warning them to take advantage of every minute of daylight and make the winter's cut of timber the largest on record. Rumor had it that the young engineer, Selden, had outpointed the Newhall Company in the game of water-rights. — None knew exactly how, but all realized that something definite was afoot when the superintendent offered a handsome premium to the camp making the greatest showing that season. The competition became hot, the men striving, under the stimulus of inter-camp rivalry, as though playing a big, whole-hearted game, rather than working overtime for wages. Never in the days of the Saint John's Company, and it was the oldest established camp in the

Dominion, had there been such a cut of timber. Gaunt, tough-sinewed, tireless, the crews labored from twilight to twilight, ate ravenously, slumbered deeper than dreams, and rose each morning to go at it again like men whose lives depended on the issue.

McLean, a wise leader, appeared at each camp at judicious intervals, tarried briefly, and was gone, leaving behind him a terse word or two of praise or blame.

While many of the older lumbermen realized that the company was getting value and a half for each man, all felt the grim spirit of battle that inspired their chief, and lifted them above mere personal plaint or faultfinding. The boys of the 'Maple Leaf and Beaver' took national pride in their company and its superintendent.

Once, as Selden visited an outlying camp, Césaire Garneau, the Lou'-Garou nudged a brother axeman and gestured toward the young engineer. 'He de wan w'at goin' make hall de log go on dat Nennassing — w'en we mak' to drive een de spreeng.'

His companion grunted. 'He don' look laik vair hole mans to do hall dat,' he grumbled.

'Mabbe dat so,' said Césaire, turning to his work. 'But wan taime Ah look een hees eye. Den Ah see w'at ees beeg — here.' And Césaire tapped his forehead, and spat as he swung up his axe.

Selden, while nominally timekeeper and general assistant to McLean, in reality represented an immediately greater potency than the superintendent himself. McLean admitted that without a proper head of water in the spring the winter's cut would be a total loss. In Selden's word lay the assurance that the Nennassing would be bankful and overflowing the coming spring. Locked in McLean's office desk was a small blue-print outlining the courses of the Great Heron and Nennassing Rivers from Newhall to Saint John's. From a loop of the Great Heron where it paralleled the Nennassing, and a few miles from the camp, ran a line, dotted on the blue-print, marked 'Cut.' The proposed channel averaged a width of some sixty yards and contemplated a course through a natural depression in the land between the two rivers.

At the southern end of the proposed cut, where it touched the Great Heron River,

the ground rose in a rocky barrier, some ten feet above the high-water mark of the stream.

Selden had already superintended the honeycombing of this obstruction with drills — hiring a crew of experienced drill hands from Montreal. At the completion of the work he had personally accompanied them back to their city as an additional safeguard against premature local advertising.

With the coming of spring Selden planned to unplug the drill holes, dry them, and charge them with dynamite. He figured that no less than half a ton of the explosive would be necessary to give immediate results. He, with McLean, deliberated long on the advisability of hiring a crew to handle the dynamite, wire it, and prepare the gigantic 'shot.' He finally agreed with McLean that they would load and wire the shot personally; losing time in the operation, but precluding the risk of discovery.

Another feature of the proposed *coup* caused some hesitation. Selden assured his chief that the turning of the Great Heron to the Nennassing would eventually inundate several square miles of forest near the

camps, and would, in time, endanger them by flood. He advised a compromise with Ezra Newhall, after the working-out of the first trial.

McLean, despite his faith in Selden's ability, had seemed somewhat skeptical as to the outcome of the plan. Selden had promptly asked his chief if he had ever seen 'Suncook Lake, in Maine, and its thoroughfare to Caribou Lake, adjoining it. McLean said he had. Selden produced a map showing 'Suncook Lake in its original bed and a dotted outline showing the inundated country and the distortion of the old river courses by artificial means. McLean was convinced.

Selden, dreaming over his plan, and not infrequently waking to the consciousness of the memory of Sunny's recent 'good-night,' felt that he had at last found the big work he had sought. Moreover, the naiad of his dreams, not ethereal, but of real warm flesh and blood, had allowed him to touch her lips in the starlight, then to vanish with a smile behind the great iron-latched door of McLean's camp.

He blessed the presence of work and worry

that drove him from too much thinking of his goddess.

And Sunny?

Long since she had learned that Marion's relinquishment of the black-bear rug was a token of supreme affection. The two girls became warm friends and had many evening confidences before the great open fireplace.

Sunny, in her magnificent vitality, fairly filled the camp with good cheer and frequent laughter at her quaint colloquialisms and native wit. Shrewdly she studied the others' deportment and speech, and quickly she realized that to become as one of them, as Selden was, could not be accomplished in weeks or months, and she wisely gave over her first impulse to be as they were at once. That, she thought, would make her unnatural and stiff, and would be noticed by them all.

Without the words to express even to herself her appreciation of the natural courtesies of speech and manner of the others, she possessed an intuitive knowledge that guided her aright. She resolved to be herself, but to watch and mark with vigilance. Moreover, as her father progressed toward

health, and frequently sat up with them beside the evening fire, her mind became pregnant with a new idea, and she longed for the old seclusion and freedom of their own home, that she might discuss her plan with her father.

The weeks — long weeks to the invalid, but short enough to McLean and Selden — rolled by in storm and cold.

Selden, calling in the evenings, was perplexed at Sunny's new attitude toward him. She was apparently as frank and cheerful as ever, yet a baffling aloofness, a something deeper than her eyes expressed, lay hidden in her heart from him. She was not displeased with him — *that* he knew. She was always glad to see him. Yet since that night, when she had slipped through the doorway and stood, bareheaded in the starlight, speechless and filled with a longing his lips but half satisfied, she had not seemed the same.

Sunny herself was conscious of the difference and Selden's knowledge of it. Womanlike, because it reflected a greater love for him and a greater sacrifice for his sake than he dreamed, she buried her secret the

deeper, and crooned over it in her heart as a mother lulls her babe.

That he would some day ask her to be his wife, she knew, and the thought sent the joyful blood pulsing to her cheeks. What she would answer when he asked — ah! Perhaps that would not so please him, yet it was best. And her lids would droop and her lips would melt to a pensive smile that touched Marion to a quick, tremulous solicitude for her friend.

And so the time drew nearer when the invalid giant, Jed Mateel, and his daughter would leave the hospitable shelter of the Saint John's camp and return to their old, free routine.

Several times Mateel had ventured out with his son, returning in the evenings weary and ravenously hungry. He laughed away all word of caution until kindly Mrs. McLean forbore to worry, but wondered at his hardihood. Finally he announced that he was going back to his traps, and, further, that he had arranged with his son to pay the McLeans for their trouble.

Mrs. McLean had protested indignantly, reminding him that it was the company

doctor that had attended him, and that Sunny's presence as a companion to her daughter made up a thousand times for any slight inconvenience that he seemed to think he had occasioned them. She concluded by saying that she would not accept one penny from them.

Big Jed Mateel had laughed, and blinked mysteriously. 'Reckon you won't,' he said, and henceforth became silent on that subject.

One morning, a week after the Mateels' departure, McLean found a package in his office. It was addressed to his wife. That evening he brought it to the camp, and, curious as children, they opened it together. From a great wrapping of buff-colored thick moose hide rolled a magnificent pelt, soft-hued, and each individual hair was tipped with silver. McLean whistled. Mrs. McLean, running her fingers through the deep, glossy fur, sighed her amazement.

'Silver fox!' exclaimed the superintendent, with appreciation inherited from a Hudson Bay Company ancestor. 'Silver fox, and, Mary, worth just about five hundred dollars right here in the woods.'

Marion, peering over her mother's shoulder, gazed with incredulous eyes. McLean, glancing up, smiled at his daughter. 'There is no name — no message — but it came from Mateel. I know that.'

'Five hundred dollars? Why, that would have been enough for Sunny ——' And the girl hesitated and flushed, finger on lip.

'Sunny's wedding expenses?' said McLean, laughing.

His daughter shook her head. 'Oh, no! I didn't mean that! But something else.'

CHAPTER XXX

With the melting of the snows in spring came the heavy night mists that blanketed the swollen Nennassing as it rolled, bankful, past the Saint John's camps.

Grumbling and roaring in the distance, the mountain streams gathered headway, and, burdened with forest litter and churning, whirling fragments of rotten ice, swept down and out to the wild currents of the Great Heron and the Nennassing until only the mightiest of shore trees stood against the countermining of the gnawing, yellow waters.

At the camps out came peaveys and pike poles, and on went the calked boots and sou'westers. Like two armies preparing for a mighty conflict, the Newhall lumbermen and the Saint John's boys, armed and accoutered, chafed to be at the game.

Selden and McLean, toiling early and late, with the assistance of the Lou'-Garou and Big Pierre, unplugged, cleaned, and loaded the vents in the rock rib along the Great

Heron River, with double charges of dynamite. Already the Newhall logs were running in the Great Heron, and the Nennassing's water mark fell daily, until McLean became alarmed at what he deemed to be Selden's stubborn procrastination. But Selden answered reasonably that to open a channel then would, of course, give them the Great Heron water, but with it would come an undesirable conglomeration of Newhall's logs at the mouth of the proposed intake. This jam might act as a very effective wall in cutting off the flow they wanted. McLean chafed. Selden smiled, and examined fuses.

Late one night, lean, grizzled little Jules la Rue roused McLean, and entered the camp, dripping with rain, yet as stolid as a pine.

'Well?' And McLean, yawning, opened a cabinet and placed a bottle and glasses on the table.

'Ah com' fraum watch dat Newhall. She hall tie up — jam, by gar! een dat helbow hof de Gr-r-eat Her-r-on.'

'Pickerel Falls?'

'Oui.' And Jules poured himself a satisfy-

ing measure of whiskey and swallowed it hastily.

McLean slipped into his oilskins and boots. 'Get Selden out, Jules. You know his camp. Tell him ——'

'Dat Selden, he ovair by dat plac'. He watch dat Nennassing hall night, Ah t'ink.'

'Good! Have another, Jules, and then get Pierre and come down to the cut. Call McCarthy as you go by and tell him to get the boys together and keep them ready — right on the job. Understand — not a man to roll a log till he hears from me.'

McLean hurried to his office and telephoned to the up-river camps one by one. To each foreman he said: 'You can start 'em when you get the signal. You'll hear it, all right.'

Turning, he found Jules at his heels. 'All right, Jules. Now for the finishing touch.'

Down to the river they strode, stumbling along the soggy trail in the darkness. Ahead, a light gleamed in a misty halo of rain. Selden, pushing back his sou'wester, greeted them briefly. 'Where's Big Pierre?' he questioned.

'Coming,' said McLean.

'Well, we'll need a crew out on the point after the first rush. We'll have to pick out the stray logs and keep the inlet from getting plugged.'

'When we get an inlet,' said McLean nervously, smiling.

Selden flushed, and was about to reply. Instead he walked to the little brown battery standing beneath a tree, and seized the handle. 'Grin, then!' he said, his overstrung nerves finding relief in the thrust of the handle. 'There's your inlet!'

For a second nothing was heard but the *drip, drip,* of the rain and the winnowing rush of the river. Then McLean staggered and fell on his face as the ground heaved and trembled. A blast of fire shot up from the distant river edge.

Stunned by the roar and crash of the explosion, Selden, swaying, dropped the handle of the battery and stumbled toward his chief. The lantern had been blown out by the concussion, and Jules crouched on the ground, feeling for it.

'Come on!' called Selden thickly. 'We've got to get to high ground or swim.'

With the first dull light of dawn a roaring

crew of the Saint John's boys swarmed to the 'cut.' McLean, standing on a rocky eminence, directed the work of keeping the channel open. The Great Heron, in full flood, swept down on the angle of the sixty-foot opening and dropped with a roar to its new channel, toppling trees down in its rush and sweeping them out on the broad, brown reaches of the rapidly rising Nennassing.

Selden, squatting by the wangan, drank hot coffee, and gazed dully at the hurtling waters. Presently he looked up to find McLean grinning at him.

'Well, Ward, I see our timber is beginning to come down from above. You made good, my boy.'

Selden nodded. 'Guess I got little old Ezra's goat that time.'

McLean grinned. Presently his face grew serious. Turning to the engineer, he asked abruptly: 'What made you leave the Hudson Bay branch and come up here?'

'I was looking for more trouble,' replied Selden, laughing.

'Yes,' began McLean hesitatingly. 'So my brother Donald rather implied in his letter about you. He was your chief there.

Naturally I looked into your last position before I took you on here permanently.'

'Your brother? Donald McLean? Well, Mac, you are a stony old clam. You might have said so.'

'Came near enough to telling you many times. So did Mrs. McLean,' replied the superintendent.

'Well, he'll know I've been busy, anyway.' And Selden finished his coffee and rose to his feet.

'Yes, and now I'm on the subject, Ward, did you plan this cut and all that it means merely to get even with Newhall, or to help me out of a fix?'

'I began to work it out as a piece of poetical justice for Ezra to digest. Then I became more or less interested in this camp, and — well — in you. Of course, I knew it would place you with the game in your hands.'

'So it was revenge first and loyalty to me afterward, eh?'

'It was. I'm not particularly proud, however, of injuring Newhall to help you. I was interested in the work for its own sake.'

'How is Newhall going to float his logs?' asked McLean.

'He can't — unless you agree to let him have the water. The more water he tries to give the Great Heron, the more water he will have to give you. Heron Lake must be emptying itself pretty fast through the southern outlet. You would have to fill this cut to give him water above. That would cost real money. Why don't you make him an offer? Say you'll fill the cut for five thousand, cash. He can't roll a log till you say so.'

'So you advise a compromise with him — even after he's pretty nearly put us out of business?'

'Why — yes. I'd say, play fair. Make him pay, but don't freeze him out.'

'He tied us up for two seasons and tried to do it the third.'

'Sure! But, Mac, there's no use rubbing it in. You're boss now.'

McLean pondered his companion's words. He was pleased with the young man's attitude toward the situation, and toward an old enemy. Selden evidently had the right spirit.

'Now you're through here, what are you going to do?' asked McLean, rising.

'I've been too busy to think of that,' replied Selden. 'Now you speak of it, I have heard that there's a good chance to develop power at Loring Falls, up in Quebec. I might interest capital in that scheme. It's a big one.'

'Interest nothing,' interrupted McLean brusquely. 'You're going to stay right here on this job as assistant superintendent. I've found out that a firm — any firm — has got to be right up to date at every angle now'-days to meet competition. We need you. If old man Smeaton will O.K. it, I'll give you two thousand a year and found. Want it?'

'I'm worth more, Mac — but that will help some,' said Selden gazing across the river. 'I like this country.'

Selden grinned as McLean eyed him shrewdly. 'Those logs — Newhall's logs — coming in the cut, remind me that I've a call to pay over that way pretty soon,' said the engineer.

'Great Scott, man! Not while things are like this!' said McLean,

'No. I'm here till the drive is through and behind the booms. No, Mac, but I do want a little vacation in — well — say

June — about a month to fish and loaf.'

'Then you accept?'

Selden extended his hand. 'Yes. Thank you, McLean. Oh, you needn't grin. I'm going over Newhall way all right, but I've already written to Aunt Lib Putter, asking her if I may board there. They can use the money. Got you that time, Mac!'

'Oh, no, ye didn't!' said McLean earnestly. 'Ye're canny — to stay just that far awa' from the lassie.'

CHAPTER XXXI

Round Uncle Clem Putter's cabin lay the light green meadow grass of early spring. He spoke of it, and of the passing of the winter weather, as he sat at breakfast that morning, gazing out of the window.

Aunt Lib, with face flushed from frying a second generous batch of pancakes, took her place at the table and poured herself a cup of coffee. 'You didn't ask the blessin' yet, Clem.'

Jovially facetious, under the influence of the first batch of cakes and his coffee, Uncle Clem replied that he had asked the blessing while she was frying the second batch, and that, if he hadn't, it would be too late to do any good, anyway.

'Clement Putter!'

Uncle Clem meekly bowed his head and mumbled, after which he uncovered the cakes, and, with some of the dexterity of a practiced spearman, he secured four large golden-brown specimens. These he transferred intact to his plate with a turn of his wrist — the result of experience. 'Go ahead,

Libby — light into 'em. You kin now, with a clear conscience. They got the sanction of men and of angels.'

'And of you, I suppose?' said Aunt Lib, with a peculiar inflection.

'Uhuh, me. But ain't I a man? I reckon I ain't a angel yet.'

'No. That's certain. And sometimes I think you're only a kind of a overgrowed boy, Clem.'

'But, say, you ain't eatin', Libby?'

'I know it, Clem. I been thinkin' about Sunny. I'm some worried about her. Seems like she's driftin' more and more away from us. She's just as kind and obligin' as ever, and good, but she's different. I'm feared ——'

Uncle Clem interrupted her with a gesture of his unemployed fork, and wagged his head sagely. 'You needn't to be,' he said finally. 'Sunny can take care of herself.'

Aunt Lib sniffed disdainfully. 'If you wasn't a man, Clem Putter, you wouldn't 'a' said that.'

'What would I 'a' said if I'd 'a' been a woman? That she couldn't take care of herself?'

'Like as not — if you'd 'a' been the kind of woman you would 'a' made. No, I'm worryin' that Sunny will be too honest and jest natural in her lovemakin' with that young Selden. I'm afeared after he's seen her for a spell he'll get kind of tired of her. When Sunny says "No" she means it. And when she says "Yes" she means it. She ain't good at pretendin'.'

'Whe-e-u-u Jiminy Galluses! Now I didn't know it would hurt any of the wimmen-folks to be honest oncet in a while. Specially when they's bein' courted. Some of 'em don't have so much chance afterward. Say, Libby, did you jest pertend you liked me when I came a-courtin' you?'

'If I did pretend about what I thought of you then, I ain't doin' it now,' she replied. 'Reckon I'd have a hard time pretendin' now.'

'Libby, when you talk like that you jest kill my appetite. I can't eat nothin'.' And he assumed a hurt expression that in no way deceived her.

'Thanks to goodness there's suthin' can kill your appetite afore it kills you. How many cakes do you think you et?'

'I never was no hand at 'rithmetic, Libby. I'm right sorry I done anything to cross you this mornin'. I seed you wa'n't feelin' jest like skippin' the rope, so I sot out to joke you into feelin' better ——'

There were tears in Aunt Lib's eyes when she lifted her head from gazing into her cup. 'I know, Clem — but I just can't bear to lose Sunny. Since we lost our baby, Clem, Sunny's been most everything to me — 'cept you. But bein' a man you don't ——'

'But we ain't lost Sunny!' exclaimed Uncle Clem, pushing back his chair and rising. 'Why, Libby, you needn't to take on so. I reckon Sunny's about as happy as she can be. Only t'other day she says to me, she says: "Uncle Clem, I bet you can't guess who is a-comin' to see you." '

'"Why, yes, I can," says I. "It's the President of the United States, of course!"'

'"Better than that!" she says, laughin'.

'"Well," says I, "I don't calc'late to know any one *better* than the President." But she spoke up brisk. "I didn't know you did know the President at all. But Ward Selden is comin' from Saint John's. He

wrote me he was comin' to visit you and Aunt Lib."'

Aunt Lib dried her eyes. Her back stiffened. 'Sunny said Ward Selden was comin' to see me and you, did she?'

'Yes'm.'

'And she pretended he wasn't comin' to see *her* at all?'

'Yes'm.'

'Huh! Sunny's doin' better than I thought for. And you jest sot there ——'

'I was standin' up, Libby.'

'Goodness, Clem — if you was! And you jest stood there, then, and pretended you didn't know he was comin' to see her. Never said anything about that?'

'Yes'm. No'm.'

'Well, Clement, you just go out to that woodpile you sawed last week and split some wood for this here stove. When you git tired of that, you can set down and think about you and Sunny bein' so maple-sugary nice about *pretendin'* to each other. Then you'll understand more about what I meant, when you was hangin' over the gate, moonin' around courtin' me.'

Uncle Clem slipped on his cap, and softly

opened and closed the kitchen door. He walked gently, as if not wishing to disturb — well, a sleeping cyclone, for instance. He shook his head several times, advanced a step toward the woodpile, stooped and picked up the axe, again shook his head. Finally, placing a short length of log upright with great deliberation, he poised the axe and dealt the wood a resounding whack. It split crisply. Again he raised the axe, hesitated, and lowered it.

'I reckon Sunny ought to told Aunt Lib first,' he muttered. And he had reckoned correctly.

Suddenly he felt in his pocket. 'Sweepin' and dustin' and moppin' I clean forgot it!' he exclaimed, drawing a letter from his pocket and rushing into the cabin. He took good Aunt Lib by storm. 'I was keepin' it for a surprise for you, Libby! Mrs. Clement Uriah Putter, Newhall, and so forth. It's yourn!' And Uncle Clem rubbed his hands together expectantly.

Aunt Lib, deliberately adjusting her 'specs,' opened the letter with a hairpin and read it silently.

'You can finish splittin' that wood, Clem.'

'By hickey, this ain't Rooshia!' he cried in a tone of hurt bravado. 'Ain't you goin' to read it?'

Aunt Lib tilted her head forward and gazed over her spectacles at her husband. 'Well,' she said slowly, 'it follows pretty close on what we was jest talkin' about. That young Ward Selden wants to come here and board the whole of June. Says he'll pay anything we ask within reason. Says he's willin' to sleep in his tent if we ain't got room in the house. Now I suppose you know what he's a-comin' for?'

'Why, to get some of your good cookin'!' said Uncle Clem, overjoyed at the opportunity for launching a compliment.

'Well, at plain cookin' — and some says my cakes is —— Cookin'? Courtin', you mean!'

'Yes'm.'

'And when you git that wood split, you can git ready to go to Newhall. Reckon I'll answer this letter right away.'

'What you goin' to say, Libby?'

'If Sunny Mateel wants that young man, and he wants her, I ain't a-goin' to stand in the way,' she said with a show of indifference

that did not deceive Uncle Clem. And she opened the door invitingly.

Clement Uriah Putter seized the axe with unusual vigor. 'Sunny and him! Sunny and him!' he exclaimed. 'Good! And Libby and me and me and Libby aidin' and abettin' the goin's on! Most as good as courtin' all over ag'in!'

CHAPTER XXXII

Jed Mateel gazed at his daughter wonderingly. Of late he had noted a subtle change in her erstwhile girlish exuberance. She was quite as happy as she had always been, but there was a softening and rounding of speech and action, a gentleness that puzzled him. It pleased him to see that, while she had changed in many little ways, she did not seem conscious of having done so. She had trapped and worked with him as usual that spring, and in the evenings she had read and re-read her one book, the 'Aucassin and Nicolette,' seemingly satisfied with its slender limitations. That she had not asked for other books, or that she had not suggested further schooling, had at first rather astonished her father. But he had great faith in her, knowing that she would never suggest anything that they could not afford. He puzzled daily over the fact that she had some plan hidden away from him. That he knew intuitively.

She sat opposite him reading, and he

glanced at her wonderingly. Accustomed as he was to her, he could not help covertly admiring her, utterly unconscious as she then was that there existed any one save the two lovers of that old romance.

'Sunny!' he said gently, and she laid her book aside, gazing with wide, gray eyes out and beyond the distant trees against the evening sky.

'Yes, dad?'

'Be you happy?'

''Course!'

'Sure certain?'

'Yes. Why, dad?'

'It jest satisfies me to know that,' he said hesitatingly. 'I'm gittin' old, and I expect I'm kind of crabbed and sot in my ways. When I git to thinkin' suthin' is *so*, it's moughty hard for me to believe it ain't so. I reckoned mebby you was wantin' suthin'.'

'You're just trying to find out — ain't you, dad?'

Mateel smiled. 'Like as not.'

Sunny nodded. Then pensively: 'Ward ain't like us, is he, dad? He's more like Alec McLean and Marion and her ma.'

'Uhuh!'

'He's comin' over to board to Aunt Lib Putter's this June.'

'So Uncle Clem's been tellin' me. Told me eight times so far. I only seen him nine times sence we got back, by count. Aunt Lib was with him oncet, so I reckon he dassent say much.'

Sunny laughed. 'You didn't tell me you knew,' she said.

'Nuther did you!' promptly replied her father.

'What you think Ward is comin' to stay so long for?'

'Well, to git fed up on Aunt Lib's cookin' — for one thing. And to git away from the Saint John's camps, for another. And lastly, I calc'late, to ast you to marry him — if I beant way off the trail.' He glanced up at his daughter, expecting her to show some embarrassment.

She met his gaze frankly.

'Yes,' she said. 'I think he is. I know he is.'

'And what you goin' to say to that?' queried her father, jokingly.

Sunny hesitated. Then she raised her eyes to the sunset over the pines. 'I'm goin' to

say "No," dad. And please don't ask me about it any more.'

Uncle Clem, making a final round of his traps, gathered them up one by one and stalked along his line, the chains jingling as he shifted the weight to his other shoulder. He paused as he came to the foot of a wooded hill, and, dropping the traps, sat down to smoke and rest. He was getting old, and rested frequently.

'Got one up there,' he remarked to himself presently. 'Got a No. 3 up there, but it's a mighty long climb. Nothin' in it nohow.' He counted his traps, and puffed indolently at his pipe. 'Reckon I'll have to climb that hill,' he said, counting on his fingers. 'Libby knows how many traps I got, and she'll count 'em and miss it.'

Slowly he arose and climbed the hill. He stopped on its wooded crest and peered beneath his palm. 'Can't see plain — but it looks like — looks like ——' He advanced toward the trap, walking like a man in a dream.

'Great grasshoppers and gumboils! If it ain't another silver fox! Jed Mateel ain't

the only one that's braggin' of havin' ketched a silver fox this far south. Gum! Reckon they must 'a' been a pair of 'em strayed down from up North. This here'll make me and Libby rich.' Then a new idea popped into his head, and he subsided to speechlessness. Springing the jaws of the trap, he drew the stiffened form out gently and carried it down the hill.

When he had come to the clearing round his cabin, he called to Aunt Lib. She hastened to the doorway, startled by his tone.

'What you think now?' he said and held up the fox.

'What you got?'

'A silver one — sech as Jed Mateel ketched a year ago. Reckon it's the mate.'

Aunt Lib examined the fox with becoming reverence. 'What you goin' to do with it?' she asked weakly, losing, for the first time in their married experience, her grip on the situation.

Clement Putter puffed out his chest, and his little goatee was stiff with pride and importance. 'Do?' he echoed. 'Do? Why, they's some folks round here has called us

stingy, so I hearn tell. Makin' up stories about me in the store at Newhall. Well, I'm goin' to show 'em. You recollec' worryin' about givin' Sunny suthin' for a weddin' present, eh? Well, here it is!'

'But, Clem, it's a whole lot of money. Five hundred dollars, you say ——'

'Now, Libby Putter, you see here!' And for once Uncle Clem Putter rose to the normal dignity of an outraged husband. 'Ef Sunny was our own, it wouldn't be too much by a jugful. I'm goin' to do this here thing up brown for oncet. We're gittin' old. Yes, by hickey, she gits this here pelt for her weddin' present!'

'But, Clem — they ain't married yet.'

'She's jest got to git married now!' said Uncle Clem, beginning to work on the pelt.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Out in the quiet reaches of the Nennassing, a silvery something flashed in the noon sunlight and disappeared. Slowly the circling ripple spread in faint and fainter diameters, finally smoothing to nothingness in the shore shadows.

June, with her quickening hand, stirred the tender green of the marginal river grasses to more robust height and to more vigorous depth of color. The sturdy cedars fringing the Nennassing's banks seemed to expand in the warmth, each wide fan casting its utmost shade upon the rocks beneath. Far pines, blue-black on the ridges of the distant hills, eased their erstwhile snow-laden branches in murmuring content. Winter, in this land of bird song and sunshine, of limpid brook and dazzling, noon-glazed lake, was as though it had never been.

Little fawns, their dun hides dappled with milky spots, lay hidden in the forest thickets while the mother does grazed nippingly on the fresh, sweet grasses of the

spring. Deeper in the forests, the bucks, their antlers velvet-sheathed and tender, strayed in individual solitude, fearful, until their antlers hardened, of each other and the dense thickets that hid the helpless fawns.

Young loons mocked the echoes of the long shadowy lagoons with wild crescendo laughter. Every living thing, from the tiniest blade of green to the tallest pine; from the busy scurrying wood mouse to the great hulking bull moose, seemed to rejoice in the season's bounty of fertility and warmth. Even the sinuous mink, for the time being, forbore to hunt, and writhed in a feline luxuriousness upon the hot sand of the riverside.

Drowsily the gaunt blue heron blinked at the bullet-eyed frog that squatted but a yard away in the floating weeds.

From the woods came the faint, fresh, breeze-wafted fragrance of bud and balsam commingled, and Sunny, walking idly down the narrow trail along the river, paused and sniffed joyously. 'Seems just like — like *life!*' she murmured, turning to gaze through the vista of shadowy, sun-thatched trees.

Her neat white summer dress, belted at the waist with a wide dark-blue ribbon,

made her appear younger than she was. From the edge of her dress peeped the daintiest and whitest of doeskin moccasins. Shoes, she had told Aunt Lib, she would not wear until compelled to do so.

That she was slightly conscious of the effective picture she made did not detract from her grace of bearing.

Altogether happy as she sauntered down the shady trail that June midday, she sang the little song from 'Aucassin and Nicolette,' blushing delightfully as she thought of the leafy bower that Nicolette had wrought.

> Leaves of many a branch I wis,
> Therewith built a lodge of green,
> . . . . . .
> Goodlier was never seen.
> If my love the lodge should spy,
> He will rest a while thereby,
> If he love me loyally.
> Thus his faith she seemed to try.

'Thus his faith she seemed to try.' And Sunny repeated the verse, sighing a little.

'But I've got to!' she assured herself. 'Ward will be disappointed, and he'll make motions with his arms and walk up and down ——'

At the edge of the clearing round the three pines, she saw him, as she had expected, coming toward her. As he saw her, he waved his hat boyishly and quickened his pace.

'Well, Sunny!' He breathed quickly, and tiny beads of sweat stood out on his bronzed face.

She took his extended hand. 'You're looking bigger and stronger than ever, Ward.'

'And you!' he said, gazing at her till she flushed beneath his open admiration. 'Well, I just can't tell you — but it does my heart good to see you again. Now the day is perfect.'

Slowly they moved across the meadow grass toward the three pines, Sunny bareheaded and gazing at the ground as she walked. Selden marched beside her with his head up and shoulders squared, unconsciously proud of her.

'How is your work, Ward?' she asked him presently.

'Made a success of the cut,' he answered. 'Then promised McLean I'd stay with the company. Signed a five-year contract at two thousand a year. Guess they must like

me for some reason or other. I'm here to stay.'

'You're going to stay in the woods right along, Ward?'

'I believe I am, Sunny. I like it up here. I'm here for five years at least. Of course, I may run in to New York or Boston once or twice a year, or perhaps take a trip to Montreal. By the way, Joe said he was coming home soon. What do you think he's up to now?'

'Grégoire la Croix?'

'That's it. He has gone North after him. Says he won't come back till he gets him to confess before a magistrate, or whatever the Canucks call 'em.'

'But you, Ward? Will Ezra Newhall ——'

'No. He's tamed. We understand each other now. He came over to the Saint John's camp some time ago. We have settled with him. "Live and let live" is the way he put it, the old hypocrite!'

'And the "cut"?'

'Well,' laughed Selden, 'that is chock-full of blow-downs and cut timber and mud just now. Of course we *can* use it again. I hope we won't have to. We had to show Newhall

what we could do, and he came to our plan, like that kind always do when they're whipped, whining and on their knees. But, Sunny ——' And he paused and gazed at the smiling face lifted toward his. 'Won't you sit down here? We can be in the shade, and chat.'

Selden spread his coat for her to sit on. Again she lifted a smiling face toward his. 'Now, Ward ——'

'I want to talk about you,' he said slowly.

'There isn't much to say, then, is there?' and she laughed softly and studied him with affectionate eyes.

'Yes, quite a lot. I just want you to know — although you do know it now — that I only want to spend the rest of my life trying to make you happy, and telling you between times how happy I'll be to have the privilege. Sunny!'

Sunny gazed across the meadow, and Selden could not help seeing the dainty white of her bodice rise and fall tumultously above her breast, as she breathed in the whole meaning of his words.

'And, Sunny?'

'Yes?'

'Won't you look up — just a minute?'

'I — I dassen't look, Ward. Then I'd want to say what you want me to, and I can't.'

'Can't?'

'Not yet, Ward.'

Nevertheless, she glanced at his troubled face, and her heart grew tumultuous. 'I know you care so much, so much, for you must care — like I do. But you don't understand,' she said slowly. 'But you *will* be glad when you do understand.'

'Glad?'

'Yes. When dad and I were at Mr. McLean's camp, I saw how your kind of folks lived and talked, and — and done things. Then I could see how different dad and I was. It made me feel kind of jealous of them folks at first. Then I thought how foolish I was to think that way — so I just laughed and made a plan. I made it that night, when you kissed me, Ward. I knowed you cared really, then. And I cared so much ——'

'You *do* care — so much, then?'

'Oh — just all! But ——'

'Then what else can matter, Sunny?'

'Everything that makes me different from you, or Marion, or Mrs. McLean. I'm goin' to school — to Montreal — and study, and then ——'

'But, Sunny — to wait so long ——'

'You can — and I must, Ward. If I can wait, then you will know how much I want you.'

He read the real depth of her love in her untroubled eyes. His pulses quieted, and he bent toward her tenderly. 'Sunny,' he murmured. 'Sunny, you're so far above me — my kind — that I can hardly dare to love you.' And she was amazed at the adoration in his face. 'Oh, Sunny, girl!' he whispered.

She touched his arm. 'I waited eighteen — almost nineteen — years for you, Ward. I guess I been waitin' for you ever since I was born. Now you must wait a little time for me. And, Ward, if I didn't know you were big enough and strong enough to wait, I wouldn't ask you to. I don't even know when I'll get money to go to school.'

'Why, Sunny! I've got enough and to spare. I've saved since I first went to work.'

She laughed in pure happiness and understanding. 'I know — I'm just the same

as your wife — in my heart — and yours a'ready, Ward. You can't ever love me more after we are really married than you do now,' she said, a bit wistfully. 'But, just the same, dad and me can't use your money, Ward.'

Her lips were tremulous, though she tried to smile. She wished to be firm in her position. Yet youth and the great wave of desire that swept through her warm free nature left her trembling in an indecision that she secretly prayed to overcome. She felt now that in Selden's hands lay her decision. One word of longing, one gesture, would draw her to him, despite all planning and all courage.

Yet, womanlike, supreme was her happiness when he stretched forth his arms and took her flushed face between his hands. 'I'll wait, Sunny,' he said gently. And, smiling, he added: 'But not for this.'

Uncle Clem Putter, on his way to the Mateels' camp, stopped suddenly as he crossed the meadow of the three pines. He whistled, a low note of astonishment mixed with humor. He grinned, and turned from the trail toward the two figures on the hillside. 'Nothin' like bein' prompt and ready,'

he said. 'The Putters allus was,' he added imaginatively. Then he called: 'Hello-o! Sunny!'

'Goodness!' exclaimed Sunny. And 'Thunder!' growled Selden, adding hastily: 'You owe me three more, Sunny, for the three days I've been here without seeing you.'

'It's jest me, folks!' chirped Uncle Clem. 'I was jest comin' over to your place to — to tell you suthin',' he said mysteriously. 'Then I seed you a — a-visitin' over here, so I come right along up.'

'Of course!' said Selden hospitably.

'It's jest — well, jest a weddin' present, folks!' he blurted, polishing his bald head and glancing about nervously. 'Aunt Lib an' me talked about it 'most all night last night. She said mebby I'd better fetch it over now, instid of waitin'.'

Hastily Uncle Clem untied the string that bound the queer-looking package he carried. 'Ketched it early this spring,' he announced. 'Silver fox. Never seen one so far south, 'ceptin' the one Jed ketched last year. Silver fox, Sunny. Weddin' present from me and Aunt Libby. Don't say nothin' — not a word! Never *was* so happy in my born days.

You ketched *him* in a b'ar trap,' he added, pointing to Selden. 'I ketched this here in a No. 3. Both of 'em's yourn, I reckon. Don't say nothin' — not a word!'

'Well, Uncle Clem, we thank you for all we're worth!' said Selden, shaking hands with the old man.

'Well, you be worth five hundred dollars more than you was when you come here. But I reckon you was feelin' rich enough even then. Now I got that lump kind of worked out of my windpipe, I mought as well say that we knowed Sunny wanted to git schoolin' afore she gits married. That's why we give you the present previous-like.' And Clement Uriah Putter, known as the stingiest man in Lomax County, stood blinking in the sun, his old heart warm with the happiness that giving always brings. He hobbled stiffly down toward the trail.

'Uncle Clem!' called Sunny. 'Oh, I want to say thanks, too! You didn't give me a chance to. Where are you going?'

He turned and called, with shrill humor: 'Where be I goin'? Well, mebby I'm goin' straight home and kiss Aunt Lib.'

THE END

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